

Hebrews 9:1-14
Leviticus 16
Psalm 122A

“A Better Tent”

March 28, 2021

Did you notice in Leviticus 16 how often people are washing with water?

Verse 4 – Aaron shall bathe his body in water and then put the holy garments on.

Verse 24 – after going through all the ritual in the Most Holy Place,
Aaron changes clothes again, and bathes his body in water.

And then in v26, the one who lets the goat go at Azazel must bathe –
and again in v28, the one who burns the bull for the sin offering –
and the goat for the sin offering –
must bathe his body in water.

Two things are needed to cleanse Israel from their uncleanness?

Washing with water – and sprinkling with blood.

Hebrews 10:22 says that because we have a great high priest – Jesus –
we may draw near “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.”

The Day of Atonement shows us what baptism means.

We are unclean – and we must be cleansed by water and by blood.

Our Psalm of Response is Psalm 122,

a song of ascents –

a song that was to be sung by pilgrims as they “ascended” to Jerusalem
as they came for the feast.

All Israel was supposed to go up three times a year –

for Passover (the fourteenth day of the first month), for Pentecost (50 days later),
and for Tabernacles (the fifteenth day of the seventh month).

The Day of Atonement came just five days earlier –

on the 10th day of the seventh month.

All of those priestly duties had to be performed on the 10th day of the month,
so that, when the people arrived for the great feast of Tabernacles five days later,
the priests would be prepared.

The high priest, had already brought Israel into the holy of holies on the 10th day!

Maybe that’s why Psalm 122 speaks of Jerusalem as a city “bound firmly together” –
or “united” “joined together.”

When the high priest entered the holy of holies – with the twelve stones on his breastplate,

representing the twelve tribes of Israel –
Jerusalem became the bond of union – uniting all the tribes.

So let us sing Psalm 122!

Sing Psalm 122A

Read Hebrews 9:1-14

Once again, though, we are talking about some pretty strange things—at least to modern ears:
altars of incense, a golden urn filled with manna, cherubim of glory,
not to mention sprinkling defiled persons with blood!
Nowadays that sounds just weird.

But Hebrews 9 is speaking to us today
just as clearly as it spoke to those who lived 2000 years ago.

Do you feel dirty?

Are you unclean?

No, I'm not asking whether you washed under your fingernails.

I'm asking whether, when you look at yourself in the mirror,
you see someone who is dirty inside.

When you look back at things that you've done,
does your conscience prick you and accuse you?

David did.

When he said, "I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."
He looked at himself and saw someone who was unclean.

How can you be clean before God?

How can you be clean—when your life is full of dirt?

That's what Hebrews 9 is all about.

Hebrews 9 tells you about God's final solution for our uncleanness
—all the dirt and filth caked between our spiritual toes.

We have already seen that we have a better high priest than in the OT,
and through Christ, a better covenant.

Now we see that we have a better tabernacle—a better tent—than Moses.

Why does that matter?

Why should we care what kind of tabernacle we have?

What was the original tabernacle for?

It was the place where God would meet with his people.

It was the place where God and man could have fellowship—

the place where we could be cleansed and made right with God.

We see this in our own way today.

Where do you get clean? At home.

Where do you get fed? At home.

Where do you find comfort and peace? At home—I hope!

The tabernacle was designed as God’s house—the place where he would cleanse his people, feed his people, and have fellowship with his people—with his family.

And all of the things described in chapter 9 were designed to fulfill these basic functions.

It’s why I sometimes point out that at Sinai God said that he would go camping with his people!

They were sleeping in tents – so he had them make him a tent.

They were cooking on little “grills” – so he had them make him a grill (the altar)!

They would wash in their little basins – so he had them make him a basin.

Why does Hebrews use the Tabernacle rather than the temple?

Because the temple is associated with David and Solomon.

Hebrews is interested in talking about Moses.

The tabernacle is the symbolic representation of the Mosaic Covenant.

*Though interestingly, the description given in verses 2-5 is more closely connected to the arrangement of the temple.

1. The First Tent (9:1-5)

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. ² For a tent^[a] was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence.^[b] It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section^[c] called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

“Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.”

Verse 1 sets up the first part of chapter 9.

Verses 2-5 describe the first tabernacle (the earthly holy place), while verses 6-10 describe the “regulations for worship.”

The words “earthly holy place” remind us that it is a part of the created order—the tabernacle was a worldly sanctuary, *not* a heavenly one.

And as we look at this, keep in mind that the limitations of the “earthly holy place” apply to every earthly sanctuary.

Do you have a sanctuary?

We use that word “sanctuary” to refer to any place where we feel safe.

Our homes, our favorite park, that special place you had as a child
where you would go to hide out!

It was a safe place – a refuge – a sanctuary.

But no earthly sanctuary, in the end, can provide a true refuge.
The dirt and filth of this world will pollute it,
if for no other reason, than that *we* are there.

And *we are* unclean.
We bring all our mess with us!

By the way – this is not to say that earthly refuges are bad!
The tabernacle was an earthly sanctuary *given by God* –
as a reminder to us of the garden –
the original earthly sanctuary!
It’s a good thing to have places that remind us of what was –
and point us forward to what *will be!*

And there was a way in which the OT holy place was as good as it gets on earth.
Because there, God himself gave us a picture of the heavenly holy place.

There were two parts, verses 2-3 tell us–
in the first section–the Holy Place–there was the lampstand
(showing that God is the one who gives light to his people–by his Word and Spirit
“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”
And remember the pillar of fire that gave light to Israel in the wilderness)
And there was the table with showbread
(showing that God is the one who feeds his people)
In the second section–the Holy of Holies, or Most Holy Place–behind the curtain,
there was a golden altar of incense,
the ark of the covenant, with the jar of manna, the staff of Aaron, and the 10 Com
(The record and reminders of God’s covenant with his people).
And over all were the cherubim of glory,
overshadowing the mercy seat–
the place where God would have mercy on his people,
through the blood of the sacrifice.

We could spend weeks looking in detail at the furniture of the tabernacle.
But Hebrews tells us, “of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”
(So we won’t go into detail now – that’s in the sermons on Exodus and Leviticus)
Hebrews does not want to be distracted from the main point.
And the main point is this two-fold division of the tabernacle,
into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

This, Hebrews tells us, is important.

WHY does Hebrews emphasize the distinction between the two sections of the tabernacle?
What is the significance of the Holy Place? Of the Most Holy Place?

In order to understand this we need to understand the “regulations for worship”
referred to in verse 1, which are explained in verses 6-10.

2. The First Ministry (9:6-10)

⁶ These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, ⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing ⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age).^[d] According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

When the tabernacle is set up,
the priests entered the first section—the Holy Place—and performed their regular duties.
Every day they would offer sacrifices according to the prescriptions of the law of Moses.
And it is this monotonous, day-after-day ritual that reveals most clearly
that the Mosaic tabernacle is a part of this age.
It is emphatically an *earthly* holy place.
It shows us that the Mosaic covenant could not bring people to God.
It kept them at a distance.

(Just imagine – being an ordinary Israelite.
You could go *to* the temple – but you couldn’t go in.)

But into the second section—the Holy of Holies—the Most Holy Place,
only the high priest could enter—and that only once each year.

(Imagine – being an ordinary priest!
You could go *in* the holy place – the first section.
But you did not dare to pass through the curtain!

Only the high priest could do that – and he could only do it once a year!)

We read about this in Leviticus 16.

That “once a year” was the Day of Atonement.

In Lev 16 we read in painful detail the exacting ritual that was required in order for a man
to enter the presence of God on behalf of his people.

Those complicated rituals are useful for at least one thing:
to show us that we *are* dirty.

Our sin has polluted us, and it is not an easy thing to get clean!

Only the blood of a sacrifice can cleanse us.

In other words,

we deserve death—and the only way to cleanse us is for something (or someone)
to die in our place.

But Hebrews says that the Holy Spirit was showing us something in Leviticus 16.

“By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened
as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age).

(Now, this is fascinating!)

What is symbolic for the present age?

The first section of the tabernacle—the Holy Place.

In other words,

what the High Priest did once each year on the Day of Atonement,
was pass from this age (the Holy Place)
into the age to come (the Most Holy Place).

The two sections of the tabernacle reflect the two ages of history:

this present age (the world as it is in Adam, in our estate of sin and misery),
and the age to come (the world as it is in Christ, in our estate of redemption).

The high priest had to come forward in time (symbolically)

anticipating the work of Christ—and pointing to that future sacrifice.

But the fact that he could only do it once a year,

demonstrated that as long as all of the OT regulations were in place,
the way into the Holy of Holies was shut.

Whenever an Israelite came into the outer court of the tabernacle or temple,

he would see the Holy Place—where only the priests could enter—
and the presence of that veil that hung over the entrance--
was a visible reminder that the way was shut.

And therefore, “according to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered

that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,

but deal only with food and drink, and various washings,
regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.”

The worship of the OT, then, consisted of parables of the coming age—

pictures that showed forth something that was yet to come.

But the Day of Atonement was unique.

At the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies,
the high priest entered the new covenant.

The Holy of Holies was the intrusion of God's heavenly dwelling place into this earth.
That's why, when the tabernacle was completed,
and later, when the temple was completed,
the glory of the LORD filled the *Most Holy Place*

The Age to Come *arrived* when the glory of LORD filled the Holy of Holies!

Only the High Priest could enter,
but in that Most Holy Place, Israel had the promise that one day
God would truly dwell with us.

In verse 1 we were told about the "regulations for worship."

Here in verse 10 we discover that these regulations for worship
were only "regulations for the body."

They could not perfect the conscience.

Our consciences continually remind us of how far short we fall from God's law.
Even the Day of Atonement could only give temporary relief.

3. But When Christ Appeared (v11-14)

But.

What a wonderful word!
But!

Verse 1 began with a Greek phrase meaning "on the one hand"
And for 10 verses we got the details of the first covenant.

Now we get the "but!"
(Read 11-12)

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,^[e] then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Now that Christ has been installed as the high priest after the order of Melchizedek—
that unique, once-for-all high priesthood—

we can see that "the time of reformation" has come.

Because Jesus has entered, not an earthly Most Holy Place,
but that "greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)"

A More Perfect Tent (v11)

Jesus has entered that to which the earthly Most Holy Place pointed.

He entered the more perfect tent.

He entered the heavenly Holy of Holies!

All through the OT, God came down from heaven.

Jacob saw a vision of the angels ascending and descending on a ladder.

Moses and the 70 elders saw an “appearance” of God riding on the firmament,
coming down from heaven (Ex 24).

Isaiah saw the glory of the LORD in the temple.

Ezekiel saw visions of God by the Chebar canal in Babylon.

Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind –

but he never came back – so we don’t really know anything about that!

But Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father –

he has entered the heavenly Holy of Holies for us!

And he entered it, not without blood,

but he brought that once-for-all sacrifice of his own precious blood
into the heavenly holy places,

thus securing an eternal redemption.

An Eternal Redemption (v12)

Think about what that means.

We often talk about how Jesus shed his blood on the cross.

And thanks be to God – that is true!

But Hebrews points out that Jesus entered the heavenly holy of holies

“by means of his own blood.”

When Aaron tried to enter the earthly holy of holies –

he had to bring blood.

But the blood of goats and bulls could only provide temporary redemption –
and then do it again next year!

And this is why no one had ever entered the heavenly holy of holies before!

Because only the blood of man could atone for man’s sin.

But no man had the power of an indestructible life.

Every other man died – and stayed dead.

Oh, sure, there are a few cases of people being raised from the dead –

but those were miraculous resuscitations.

Jesus rose from the grave because death could not hold him!

And so when Jesus rose from the dead,
he ascended into heaven,
and when he came to the heavenly holy of holies –
where no man had dared to tread! –
he came bringing his own blood – the blood of the Son of God!

If God purified and cleansed his people in the OT through these weak and feeble signs,
how much more will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God,
purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

A Purified Conscience (v13-14)

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify^[u] for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our^[s] conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The OT sacrifices purified the flesh.

They rendered the people of God pure for the purposes of worshiping God.
But the OT sacrifices could not purify the conscience.

David recognized this in Psalm 51.

After his adultery with Bathsheba – and his murder of her husband, Uriah –
David says, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.” (Ps 51:16)

David understood: burnt offerings and peace offerings (sacrifices)
do not *actually* pay for sin.

(Think about it: if you could *actually* pay for sin by an animal sacrifice,
then you could sin however much you like,
and then offer your animal sacrifices – and everything’s good!)

David understood that willful, intentional sin has no sacrifice in the OT.
His conscience could not be purified by killing a bull!

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

Only the blood of Christ can purify your conscience!

Only that eternal redemption that only he could secure!

Back in chapter 4, verse 16, Hebrews called us to come boldly to the throne of grace,
that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

And now we hear that Jesus is the one who has found that grace –
he has obtained that grace through his own precious blood.

That is why we now draw near to God – in Jesus – through Jesus – with Jesus!

Jesus has offered that final sacrifice that cleanses us from all our sins.

And because of this, he has brought us into the heavenly Holy of Holies,
so that we might serve him.

How can we enter the heavenly Holy of Holies?

How can we come near to God?

Read Hebrews 10:19-22

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,
²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,
²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near 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.

You need have to heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience,
and your bodies washed with pure water.

Just as the priests of old were consecrated through the washing with water
and the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice,

so also we need to be washed and cleansed:

both by the water of baptism, and by that to which the water of baptism points–
namely, the blood of Jesus Christ.

Just getting wet does not accomplish salvation!

I love how Martin Luther puts it:

7. The eye of sense alone is dim
and nothing sees but water;
faith sees Christ Jesus and in him
the Lamb ordained for slaughter.
It sees the cleansing fountain red
with the dear blood of Jesus,
which from their sins, inherited
from fallen Adam, frees us
and from our own misdoings.

This is what Hebrews is saying: “how much more will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God,
to purify our conscience from dead works.”

Your conscience is purified.
Your conscience is clean before God!

I know – I’m like you!
You say, “But God, I’m such a sinner!”
And He says, “I know – that’s why I sent my Son.”
You say, “Even my best deeds are as filthy rags!”
And Jesus says, “Not anymore! I have purified your conscience from dead works.
I have washed away your sins.
There is no filth left in you!”

I know – I wanna say the same thing you wanna say:
“But Lord, there’s so much filth left...”

This is why the whole of the Christian life is simply a life of repentance!
And repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of
his sin – and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ – does, with grief and hatred of his sin,
turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.