The Supremacy of The Son of God

Studies in Hebrews

34) Superior Priesthood (part 3) Heb. 9:1-10

**Hebrews 9:1-10** Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

**Outlines:**

A. Christ is **Superior to the Prophets** (1:1-3)

B. Christ is **Superior to the Angels** (1:4–2:18)

C. Christ is **Superior to Moses** (3:1–4:16)

            D. Christ is **Superior to Aaron** (5:1-10:18)

1. **Superior High Priest** (5:1-7-28)

2. **Superior Priesthood** (8:1-10:18)720

- Better Sanctuary (8:1-6)

- Better Covenant (8:7-13)

- Better Ministry (9:1-28)

- Better Sacrifice (10:1-18)

In 9:1-10, the author of Hebrews concentrates narrowly upon the disposition of the tabernacle and its provisions for cultic worship. In 9:1, the author of Hebrews mentions 2 aspects of that first covenant (which he just said that it was obsolete 8:13): 1- ordinances of divine service, which he discusses later in v6-10, and 2- he earthly sanctuary, which he discussed in v 2-5.

As a unit, 9:1–10 sets the stage for the account of the priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary in 9:11–10:18. In contrast to the limited access to God provided under the Levitical arrangement and the inadequacy of its offerings, the writer will stress the unhindered access provided by the eschatological high priest and the finality of his offering in the heavenly sanctuary. The significant element in 9:1–10 is the introduction of the cultic terminology and its leading motif: access to God is possible only through the medium of blood.721

v 1 “**the earthly sanctuary.**”

Describing the sanctuary as “earthly” indicates that the tabernacle is not only transitory but participates in the imperfection of the present world. This description highlight the superiority of Christ who entered **“the true sanctuary which the Lord erected and not man” 8:2** and sets the stage to what the author of Hebrews pointed out later **Heb 9:11** “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building” and **Heb 9:24** “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us”722

**2 problems in v 4:**

**Problem 1:**The problem with v4 is that the author of Hebrews placed the golden “censer” within the veil. Many explanations have been offered, but the most plausible is the one that focuses on the word “had” in “*had* the golden censer and the ark of the covenant.” The participle "having" should naturally mean the same thing with reference to the incense-altar as with reference to the ark of the covenant. There was, however, a special connection between the incense-altar and the holy of holies, no matter on which side of the veil the altar stood. On the one day in the year when the holy of holies was entered, the incense-altar played a significant part; not only was the holy of holies never entered without incense from the incense-altar (Lev 16:12f.), but the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement was sprinkled on the horns of the incense-altar as well as on the mercy-seat (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:15).723 The author of Hebrews has not made a mistake. We must remember that in chapter 9 he is expounding the events of the great Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). On that one day the veil was opened, and the altar of incense was considered a part of the ritual that went on in the Holiest of All. In other words, the author is not speaking of the physical location of the altar of incense. Rather he is speaking of its ritual relationship to the Holiest of All on the annual Day of Atonement.724

**Problem 2:**

Another problem is that According to **Ex. 16:33f.** Moses commanded Aaron to put an omer of manna “before the testimony, to be kept." Similarly, in **Num. 17:1-10** Moses directed Aaron to put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels (Num. 17:10) Does the phrase "before the testimony" imply that these objects were placed inside the ark, or simply that that they were laid in front of it?

Since the OT has nothing to say of the jar of manna outside Ex. 16:33f., and nothing to say of Aaron's rod after it was used to strike the rock in Kadesh (Num. 20:8-11), it is open to anyone to surmise that, even if they were not originally in the ark, they were put there subsequently for safekeeping.725

**6–7 In these two verses,** which are closely linked by a μὲν … δέ construction (“on the one hand … but on the other”), introduces a series of contrasts between the cultic functions of the priests (v 6) and of the high priest (v 7).

The priests enter εἰς μὲν τὴν πρώτην σκηνήν, “into the front compartment”; the high priest enters εἰς δὲ τὴν δευτέραν, “into the rear compartment.”

They enter διὰ παντός, “continually”; he enters ἀπαξ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ, “once a year.”

Their entry is unqualified, apart from the fact that it was related to the discharge of cultic duties; his entry is qualified as being οὐ χωρὶς αἵματος, “not without blood.”726

**“first part…second part” v6-7**

The writer’s distinctive use of πρώτη, “first,” and δευτέρα, “second,” to describe spatially the two compartments of the tabernacle recalls his use of these numerical terms to designate the old and new covenants (8:7, 13). The “front compartment” (ἡ πρώτη σκηνή) becomes a spatial metaphor for the time when the “first covenant” (ἡ πρώτη διαθήκη) was in force. As an illustration for the old age, which is now in process of dissolution (8:13), it symbolizes the total first covenant order with its daily and annual cultic ritual (9:6, 7).

Once the first has been invalidated, the second becomes operative (see 10:8-9 “Previously saying, “Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second” ).

In the figurative language of the writer, the front compartment of the tabernacle was symbolic of the present age (τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα), which through the intrusion of the καιρὸς διορθώσεως, “the time of correction” (v 10), has been superseded.727

**v7 “not without blood”**

In the statement concerning the high priest (v 7), the reference to the Day of Atonement is unmistakable. The high priest alone was permitted to enter the inner sanctuary (Lev 16:32–33). He was not to do so arbitrarily, but only once a year (Lev 16:2, 34), and then only under strictly prescribed conditions (Lev 16:3–17). The one condition the writer specifies is οὐ χωρὶς αἵματος, “never without blood,” which the high priest offered for his own sins and for the sins committed in ignorance by the people (see Comment on 5:1–3; Comment on 7:27).728

The significant phrase χωρὶς αἵματος, “without blood,”729 was mentioned 3 times in Hebrews 9:

9:7  But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood,

9:18  Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.

9:22 and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

**“he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance;” v 7**

The writer’s departure from the language of the LXX to describe the action of the high priest is striking. The singular use of the verb προσφέρειν, **“to offer**,” in reference to the application of blood in the Most Holy Place is without parallel in the biblical cultic material. The translators of the LXX used the verbs ῥαίνειν, “**to sprinkle**,” and ἐπιτιθέναι, “**to apply**,” to denote the act of aspersion. The subsequent use of προσφέρειν “**offer” in reference to Christ’s death (9:14, 25, 28; 10:12)** suggests that the writer has described the annual sprinkling of blood in the inner sanctuary in this way in order to prepare his readers to recognize the typological parallel between the high point of the atonement ritual under the old covenant and the self-offering of Christ on the cross.

This inference finds support when the writer applies the Day of Atonement ritual to Christ in 9:25–28. The annual entrance of the high priest for blood aspersion in the Most Holy Place finds its eschatological fulfillment in Christ’s death (προσφορά, “offering”; 10:10, 14). The creative use of unusual terminology to describe the atonement ritual in v 7 is indicative that the writer’s interpretation of the Levitical rite is controlled by the Christ-event.730

**“the Holy Spirit indicating this” v 8**

The phrase τοῦτο δηλοῦντος τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, “the Holy Spirit showing by this,” connotes more than an acknowledgment of the Spirit’s role in the inspiration of the text of Scripture. It constitutes a claim to special insight which was not previously available to readers of the OT but which has clarified the meaning and purpose of the cultic provisions for Israel in the light of the fulfillment in Christ.731

**“that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing” v8**

Because The west wall of the Holy Place (the veil) was in fact an obstacle to God’s presence.732

**“him who performed the service ” v9**

Considerations of context indicate that the expression is to be interpreted in accordance with LXX usage where λατρεύειν denotes cultic worship generally (e.g., Exod 3:12; 4:23; 7:16). The expression describes the individual in his role as worshiper, who would “draw near to God” (10:1). The quest for a cleansed conscience through the observance of the cultic prescriptions was the concern of priests and lay persons alike.733

**“perfect in regard to the conscience” v9**

The use of the verb τελειοῦν, “to perfect,” in this context is significant. In his treatment of Heb 7:11–19, Peterson showed that the perfecting of believers in terms of a relationship to God is the primary thought (“Examination,” 174–222; see above, Note u). The writer now specifies that this relationship cannot be perfected until the conscience is cleansed decisively from the defilement of sin. Defilement extends to the conscience as well as to the body and is inimical to the approach to the living God. “Perfection” in this context involves purgation. The fact that the most solemn ceremonies of the preceding covenant, those of the Day of Atonement, had to be repeated annually (9:7, 25; 10:1–3) underscores the inability of the old cultus to effect a permanent purgation.734

The lessons of the rituals, vv. 9b-10. The rituals of the Old testament were ultimately a failure for three reasons:735

1. They were external. The laws dealt with all phases of life–food and drink laws, washing laws, laws relating to clothing and beards, etc. (v. 10a). Such regulations had nothing to do with the spiritual condition of a person’s heart.

2. They were ineffective. They did not make a sinner or his/her priest “perfect in regard to the conscience” (v. 9a), i.e., they did not erase a person’s sin and make him/her qualified to enter God’s presence.

3. They were temporary. The old rituals were imposed only “until the time of reformation” (v. 10b). The Greek term translated reformation was used in ancient times of the setting of a bone, the repairing of roads and the paying of debts. It means “to put things right.” It refers here to the time of the new order when Christ appeared and did what the old covenant could not do.