

LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 9:1-14

For Discussion: What does it feel like to be in the wrong (i.e., guilty) on an issue? What thoughts/reactions do you have when you have committed some sort of offense?

Read Hebrews 9:1-14

For review: In Hebrews 8:1-13, the author arrived at the culmination of the discourse that he was building throughout the preceding chapters. By demonstrating the greatness of Jesus' priestly predecessor, the priesthood to which they both belonged, as well as Jesus' own ministry, the author leads his readers to recognize that even the new covenant that God now makes with His people through Christ surpasses the one that He made with the previous generations. In this new covenant, God takes upon Himself the responsibility for fulfilling its terms and guarantees with it better blessings that include transformation of the heart, a personal relationship with Him, and forgiveness of our sins. The author now proceeds to contrast the offerings of the old high priests with the one presented by Jesus that has made this new covenant possible.

Tent of meeting/Tabernacle (Ex. 26:1-37, 40:1-38) – The portable tent that contained the holy items used in Israel's worship and the place where the priests and high priest performed their duties.

Holy Place – The outer (eastern) section of the tent that contained the lampstand, table, bread, and altar of incense. Only the priests and the high priest were allowed in this section.

Lampstand (Ex. 25:31-40, 27:20-21, Lev. 24:1-4) – The sole source of light in the tent, its lamps were kept continuously burning.

Table (Ex. 25:23-29) – The table that held the loaves of bread that were offered to God.

Bread of the presence (Ex. 25:30, Lev. 24:5-9) – The twelve loaves that were presented as a food offering from the people of Israel.

Golden altar of incense (Ex. 30:1-10 esp. v.7-8) – The altar used for burning incense offerings.

Most Holy Place – The inner (western) section of the tabernacle that contained the ark of the covenant where God met with the high priest. Only the high priest was allowed in this section and only on the day of atonement (Lev. 23:27-28).

Ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10-16) – The chest that held the items of remembrance that God directed Israel to keep.

Golden urn of manna (Ex. 16:1-36 esp. v.31-35) – The food that God provided to feed Israel during their wanderings in the wilderness.

Aaron's budded staff (Num. 17:1-11) – The staff that God caused to sprout and grow almonds to vindicate Aaron as His chosen priest.

Tablets of the covenant (Ex. 31:18, 32:15-19, 34:1-28, Deut. 9:9, 10:5) – The second copy of the ten commandments written on tablets of stone that God gave to Moses after the first ones were broken.

Mercy seat and cherubim of glory (Ex. 25:17-22, Num. 7:89) – The cover for the ark that was topped with the figures of two angelic beings. It is where God visibly manifested His presence to meet with the high priest.

Even for an abridged summary, the list the author provides of the tent's furniture and the instructions for the priests is extensive. What does this careful treatment of the implements and procedures for worship reveal about how God desires to be worshipped?¹ Where do you see these principles in practice in how this church worships together?²

¹God is to be worshipped on His terms, not ours. He is the one who defines what acceptable worship is.

-It was God who gave the design for the tent and its vessels and laid out the duties and restrictions for the priests.

-These instructions are not arbitrary demands but God's gracious guidance so that people could worship Him properly and be blessed in doing so.

¹There is orderliness in worship (E.g., different roles for the priests and high priest, specific schedules for different rituals, a distinction between what is holy and what is common).

¹Worship is to happen regularly as a recurring part of life => The ministry of the priests was regular and ongoing.

¹Remembrance is an important aspect of worship. The symbols contained in the ark (the manna, staff, and tablets) had special meaning that evoked memories of God's involvement in the lives of His people.

-They pointed people to God's law and, unavoidably, the fact that they had broken it but also, in spite of this, God's provision for them in terms of physical sustenance and spiritual mediation.

²Though the structure and order of modern worship services may differ, the heart and intention behind them can reflect the same principles.

²Worship is conducted in an orderly rather than chaotic manner (E.g., structured times for listening to others and for singing/ conversing, participating in worship in unison => prayer, singing, communion).

²Corporate worship is conducted on a regular basis (E.g., every week at the same time).

²Worship is thoughtful and focused on God – The elements of it either point to Him or communicate an aspect of who He is.

²Modern objects of remembrance exist in the cross, in ordinances like communion, and informally in photos and plaques.

-These help us to remember God's dealings with us in the past, point to His presence with us now, and encourage us to trust in Him for the future.

The tabernacle, where God manifested His presence, was setup at the center of the camp in the midst of all the people. At the same time, God was in its inner room, which was only accessible through the outer room, which had a guarded entrance (Num. 3:5-10, 38, 18:1-4). The tabernacle itself was inside a courtyard that was sectioned off by a barrier from the rest of the camp. What two opposing truths can be seen from this arrangement of the tent and its placement among the people?

- 1) God is near to His people – He was with them wherever they went and He resided in the space where they lived.
 - The presence of the structure where people brought their sacrifices to God was an ongoing reminder that their lives revolved around their worship of Him.
- 2) Despite the proximity of the tent of God's presence, God Himself was mysterious and inaccessible (v.8). He was separated both visually and physically by the courtyard's walls, the tent, and the curtains that covered all of the entrances.
 - There were multiple layers of separation between God and the people that could not be crossed on pain of death.
 - Separation is further highlighted by the need for the high priest to approach God on the people's behalf.
 - Even for the high priest, there were limits to his access: he could only enter the Most Holy Place once a year on a specific day (v.7, Lev. 16:29-34) and he could only enter with a blood offering (v.7).

There is a tension between God's personal and relational nature and His unapproachable holiness.

After introducing the tabernacle and those who served in it, the author turns his attention to the sacrifices that the high priests offered. God took seriously both the offering that Jesus made and those made by the high priests who came before Him. What is the blood of each of these sacrifices capable of cleansing?¹ In what other ways is Christ's sacrifice superior?² What is the goal of the cleansing that is accomplished by Christ (v.14)?³

- ¹The blood of animals brought by the high priests (v.12-13) was effective for outward cleansing.
 - Those sacrifices dealt with the body (v.10) and the flesh (v.13) but stopped short at that.
- ¹The blood of Christ that He Himself brought (v.12, 14) is able to cleanse us internally.
 - His sacrifice has the power to reach our conscience (v.9b, 14) to purify and perfect it.
- ²Each high priest enters their holy place through blood that is shed, but Christ entered the true holy place by His sacrifice (v.24).
 - Christ's entry was permanent (v.12) while the other high priests were unable to stay and had to repeatedly re-enter (v.6-7).
- ²The blood of the old sacrifices applied only to the unintentional sins of the people (v.7) and only retroactively to past sins. It also did nothing to prevent further sins, which is why they had to continue to be offered.
 - Some sins under the old covenant required the death penalty (E.g., Ex. 21:12-14, 22:18-20, Deut. 21:18-21, 22:22-25).
- ²The blood of Christ that was shed once for all (v.25-26, Heb. 7:27) is able to pay for all of a person's sins, not only the unintentional ones or the ones committed beforehand. It is also transformative to the person's conscience (v.9, 14).
- ³Purification makes us acceptable to serve God. Our true act of service is the worship we bring to Him (**Heb. 12:28, 13:15**).

Recognition of our sin, especially sin that remains unconfessed, can weigh heavily on our consciences. The accompanying guilt and shame can become an area of attack by our enemy to keep us from turning to God in repentance or experiencing the freedom that comes from forgiveness. What makes it difficult for you to turn to God with your sins or to accept that they can be truly and fully forgiven?¹ What beliefs or assumptions underlie those things?² What truths about who Christ is and what He has done can speak against them?³

- ¹Examples: shame in facing God, pride in wanting to deal with the problem on our own, lack of desire for reconciliation with God, prioritizing worldly values over godly ones, selfishness/unwillingness to give up the sin, having too big a view of sin and too small a view of Christ, not understanding the need for sanctification or the consequences of hardening our heart.
- ²Examples: there is a limit to God's forgiveness (either of quantity or severity), God views us and our sin the way that we or other people do, it is possible to live with a foot in the world's camp as well as God's, a "minor" or private sin doesn't matter to God.

Reflection and application

Our sinfulness is what has separated us from God, impeding our worship of Him. None of the sacrifices offered by the former priests could change this separation and bring us closer to God, but where the old sacrifices only cleansed externally and temporarily, the blood of Christ is able to cleanse internally and eternally. For those who have placed their trust in this sacrifice, instead of evoking shame and guilt, the memory of our past sins can instead point us to God (rather than ourselves) and bring us to a place of thankfulness, awe, and worship. We do not lose the sense of sin's weightiness or severity for having been forgiven them, but this truth should bring us to a greater appreciation of all we have received in Christ. Additionally, the transformative perfecting of our conscience includes a restoration of it from its corruption by sin so that it can properly discern right from wrong, correctly calling good and evil what they really are, to free us from the affliction of both true and false guilt. Let us with assurance turn to God for the forgiveness of our offenses, worshipping and loving Him much with our service because of how much we are forgiven in Christ (Luke 7:47).