

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? Where do you see these principles in practice in how this church worships together?

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?

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? In what other ways is Christ's sacrifice superior? What is the goal of the cleansing that is accomplished by Christ (v.14)?

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? What beliefs or assumptions underlie those things? What truths about who Christ is and what He has done can speak against them?

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).