

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 8a, Hebrews 9:1-10:18: Christ our Atonement (Part 1)

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In Hebrews chapter 9, verse 1 through chapter 10, verse 18, the preacher turns to two other significant questions building on those he addressed in chapters 7 and 8. First, what is the meaning of Jesus' death and ascension if we understand these as the work of a priest in Melchizedek's line? And second, what are the consequences for those who approach God through the mediation of Jesus rather than the mediation of the Levitical priests? In 9 verses 1 through 10, the author looks at the spatial arrangement of the tabernacle or the temple and identifies therein the essential flaw of the Levitical priestly system and the law that regulated it. These were unable to broaden access to God's presence beyond the high priest to the entire people. In chapter 9, verses 11 to 14, the author looks at Christ's ascension as an entry into the heavenly holy of holies to perform the one finally effective day of atonement ritual.

He uses a greater to the lesser argument in regard to the blood of animal sacrifices, which is only so effective, and the blood of Jesus, which must be far more powerful, a ritual detergent, as it were, for removing the defilement of sin. He shifts his interpretive framework in 9, verses 15 to 22, from the day of the atonement ritual in Leviticus 16 to the covenant inauguration right found in Exodus chapter 24. The right that Moses performed to initiate the Sinaitic covenant becomes a second template for understanding Christ's death and his ascension into the heavenly holy place as a ritual act that initiates the new covenant announced in Jeremiah 31.

In the final verses of chapter 9, verses 23 to 28, the author returns to the frame of the day of atonement ritual as he considers Christ's entry into the heavenly holy place as the cosmic equivalent of the work of the earthly high priest entering the earthly holy of holies with the blood of the bull and the goat to remove the defilement of sin from the mercy seat. The author will argue that Christ's entry into heaven after his obedience unto death effectively removes the memory of sin's defilement from God's very presence. In chapter 10, verses 1 through 10, the author returns to the topic of the repetition of sacrifices in the Levitical system to argue that this annual repetition of the same sacrifices indicates their ineffectiveness in dealing with the sin and the defilement that kept people at a distance from God.

Then he turns to Psalm 40, verses 6 to 8, as a scriptural warrant for the one effective sacrifice that Jesus would perform by offering himself once and for all. The author concludes this central section on the priestly ministry of Jesus in chapter 10, verses 11 to 18, by looking again to Psalm 110, verse 1, where Jesus is invited to sit at God's right hand in connection with his appointment to priesthood. The preacher finds

here in the sitting down of Jesus proof of the effectiveness of Christ's offering because the Levitical priests are known to continually stand at their priestly service.

But the fact that Jesus sits down beside God is taken by the preacher as proof that Jesus' priestly work is decisively accomplished and will not need ever to be repeated. He closes with another recitation of Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 33 and 34 as a kind of QED as if to say, I have proven my point, having shown that indeed in Christ, the decisive removal of sins both from the conscience of the worshiper and the very presence of the Almighty God in heaven has been finally accomplished. In chapter 9, verses 1 to 10, the author takes a closer look at the arrangement of the earthly tabernacle and identifies precisely what the problem was and what was blameworthy about the first covenant.

The author has already hinted at this in chapter 7, verses 11 and 19. The Torah's cultic regulations and its priesthood were unable to bring about perfection. That is, they were unable to cleanse the conscience of the worshippers so that those worshippers could draw all the way close to God and not merely move all the way into the earthly tabernacle but all the way into the heavenly prototype, the heavenly holy place where God dwelt.

Now the author will provide an explanation of that charge by contemplating the regulations for cultic service and the layout of the worldly shrine, the earthly temple, which were decreed by the first covenant. And so we read, Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. A tent was constructed, the first one, which included the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the presence.

This is called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies. In it stood the golden altar of incense and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there was the golden urn holding the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.

Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things, we cannot now speak in detail. With that last disclaimer, the author indicates that he is not going to speculate about the spiritual significance or the meaning of the accouterments of the temple, unlike Philo of Alexandria, for example.

When Philo wrote about the layout of the tabernacle, he developed at great length the allegorical, moral, and spiritual significance of every piece of furniture in the tabernacle. What interests our author, however, are the spatial arrangements themselves and the limitations on access to God that these arrangements perpetuated, as he goes on to say in verses 6 and 7. Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties, but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without

taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people. The central problem that the first covenant perpetuated rather than overcame appears for this author to be the gradations in access to God.

That is to say, the bulk of the Israelites could only go so far, so close to God, and then had to stop. The bulk of the priests could only go so much further toward God and then had to stop. Only the high priest could go all the way into the Holy of Holies, which represented God's actual presence, and then he was limited to making such an entry only once a year.

The priests carried out their duties in the outer chamber, tending the lampstand and replacing the consecrated loaves, the showbread. According to Exodus 30 verses 7 and 8, the priests would also offer incense on the altar of incense, although the author of Hebrews' placement of this author in the inner chamber would be problematic in this regard. This place, the further chamber, where God was thought to dwell, was entered only once each year by only one man, the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, when he took into the Holy of Holies the blood that covered first his own sins and then the sins of the people, and then only those committed unknowingly or in ignorance.

This ritual, described at length in Leviticus 16, is an essential background for the author's reflection on the activity of the Levitical high priests and the achievement of Jesus throughout this section. The lay Israelites, the ordinary priests, and the high priest represented three levels of holiness, three levels of adherence to purity requirements, and with each level came the added privilege and danger of moving closer to the awesome presence of God's holiness itself. The priesthood was not in itself a barrier to access to God, but it also wasn't able to improve the access to God of the ordinary worshiper.

The cultic regulations of the First Covenant, therefore, made sure that the nation kept its distance from God, building a hedge of punishments for encroachment and an aura of taboo around the Holy of Holies so as to protect the holiness of God, or more accurately, to protect the nation from the holiness of God breaking out against their uncleanness. The author of Hebrews regards this arrangement as unsatisfactory. He understands God's promise to dwell in the midst of his people to signal a much more intimate relationship with all the people and, thus, a relationship that went unfulfilled under the First Covenant.

He finds a kindred spirit in John the Seer, the author of Revelation, who looks forward to the New Jerusalem for the fulfillment of God's hope. We read there that in John's New Jerusalem, there is specifically no temple because of graded access to God, and the limitations of access to God have been eliminated. Thus, our author comes to his point in Hebrews 9, verses 8 to 10.

The cultic arrangements of the First Tabernacle, with their perpetual maintenance of boundaries and barriers to God's presence, are a vehicle, quote, which is a figure for the present time, still has cultic status, in which chamber gifts and sacrifices are being offered that cannot perfect the worshiper in regard to his or her conscience, being only matters of foods and drinks and various ablutions, regulations limited to the flesh, having force until a time of setting things right. The yet is significant. The way into the holy places has not yet been shown.

The author looks forward to the day when the way in will be made clear, as we'll read in chapter 10, verses 19 to 20, and even more explicitly in chapter 12, verses 26 to 28. It is on the day when material creation is shaken and removed that the way into the invisible realm will be opened up and made clear to those who have been prepared by Christ's sacrifice to enter it. Here, the author claims that the Holy Spirit made clear, by means of the arrangements of the Tabernacle, that the way into the Holy of Holies has not yet been revealed, while that first tent has cultic standing, which he calls a parable for the present time.

The first tent is said to have a metaphorical significance. It is a parable pointing to the present time. This parenthetical remark interjects a cosmological dimension to the layout of the first Tabernacle, one that will again be clarified in chapter 12, verses 26 to 28.

The outer tent, the Holy Place, is a symbol of the present age when the visible creation itself still hides the entry into the heavenly, permanent, unseen realm represented by the second chamber. The way will be made clear when that first chamber that is, this visible creation is shaken and removed so that what is unshaken may abide. The essential point in this passage has to do, once again, then, with a failure of the Levitical sacrifices to broaden access to God among the whole people.

As the author writes, in this tent, sacrifices are offered that are not able to perfect the worshipper in regard to conscience. That is, they could not bring the conscience of the worshipper to the divinely appointed goal of allowing the worshipper to stand in the very presence of God in anticipation of favor rather than in fear of destruction. The fact that the many sacrifices left the worshippers still standing perpetually outside proves for our author the inefficacy of the whole system.

So, he writes that the sacrifices only have force, which he quotes in regards to foods and drinks and various ablutions or ritual purifications being regulations for the flesh in force until a time of renewing or a time of setting things right. The author criticizes the regulations of the first covenant as merely regulations of the flesh, prescriptions concerned with food, like the dietary regulations of the Torah or purificatory washings of the body, which are incapable of extending sanctifying power to the inner person. For the author, however, the time of correction, of setting things right, has already arrived.

For Jesus, the high priest has already entered the heavenly tabernacle and instituted the new covenant of Jeremiah 31. The first tent has already lost its cultic standing as the author's exegesis of Psalm 40, verses 6 to 8, will demonstrate a little later in chapter 10. Hebrews 9, verse 7, has established the Day of Atonement rite as a frame of reference for the comparison of the work of the Levitical high priests and the work of the priest in the line of Melchizedek, namely Jesus.

Since the Day of Atonement rite is such an important background to the author's exposition in these chapters, we should pause for a moment and refresh our memories concerning the various stages of that very important ritual in the life of Israel. The first major liturgical movement in the Day of Atonement ritual is that the high priest slaughters a bull as a sin offering for himself and his family. He burns incense in the Holy of Holies in a censer, and he sprinkles the mercy seat with the blood of that bull.

In a second move, the high priest selects two goats and slaughters one as a sin offering for the people. Again, he enters the Holy of Holies to sprinkle that goat's blood on the mercy seat, making atonement for the sins of the people. The high priest smears some of the blood of both the bull and the goat on the four corners of the altar of burnt offering.

The high priest then presents the second goat, lays his hands upon it, confesses over its head all the sins of the people, and sends that goat out of the camp. The goat is conducted by someone into the desert and there released for Azazel, the demon spirit of the desert. The high priest then immerses himself in water, changes his garments, and offers the fat from the two sin offerings, the first goat and the bull, on the altar.

Finally, the rest of the carcasses of the bull and the goat are taken outside the camp by other priests and burned. In this liturgical rite, there are two essential components. First, those acts that cleanse the holy places from the defilement of the people's sins.

And second, those aspects of the rite that cleanse the people themselves from the defilement of their sins. That first element might strike us as odd, but in the ancient Israelite conception of things, sins against the covenant didn't just defile the person who committed the sin. There was a kind of mirroring effect on the conscience of the worshiper, on the one hand, and on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, on the other hand.

What one great scholar of both Leviticus and Numbers, Jacob Milgram, has called the picture of Dorian gray effect of the sins of the people on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. Thus, the rite of atonement had this dual aspect to get sin out of the way in

two different locales, the place of God's presence and, of course, the conscience of the worshiper who had sinned in the first place. Just as the first covenant then had a sanctuary and cultic regulations, the preacher believes the second covenant to have its own associated sanctuary, the heavenly one, and its own sacrificial rites.

The old ritual maps, like the map of the day of atonement rite, function as prototypes. They provide the conceptual raw materials, but these are combined in new and impossible ways, in effect, by the new priest, by Jesus, who becomes himself both the mediator and the offering. So, we read in the next paragraph, But Christ, having become the high priest of the good things that came into being, entered once and for all through the better and more perfect tent, which is not made by hands, that is, not of this creation, into the holy places, not through the blood of goats and bulls, but through his own blood, inventing eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkled ash of a heifer sanctify the defiled with regard to the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who offered himself blameless to God through eternal spirit, cleanse our conscience from dead works in order to serve the living God? The author again affirms that Jesus' ministry takes place in a superior locale, the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not belonging to this creation. The description here of the heavenly sanctuary as the greater and more perfect tent supports first the understanding of perfection language as related to crossing the threshold between the visible and the invisible realms. The heavenly temple is more perfect because it exists in the unshakable abiding realm.

Second, the author's distinction between this creation and the realm into which Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us supports a reading of Hebrews 9.9 that involves more than the mere replacement of the Old Testament cult. This creation itself stands between the believer and final complete access to God. Thus, Jesus must pass through the created heavens in order to enter that abiding place of meditation that belongs not to this material visible realm.

The way into the holy places has indeed been revealed now. Believers may follow into that space in prayer and collective worship, but even more, may follow in person when Christ returns a second time to usher them along with himself into glory. Jesus' ministry also involves superior ritual elements.

He enters heaven itself not through the blood of goats and bulls but through his own blood. The purificatory medium of the second covenant is far more costly since it involves the death of the very Son of God. Hence, also the greater danger that will accompany profaning this blood by thinking too little of the benefits it has brought, as the author will bring home shortly in chapter 10, verse 29.

The once-for-all aspect of Jesus' sacrifice reflects the quality of the redemption he obtains. It is eternal redemption because it lasts forever and needs no repetition. For our preacher, repetition is a sign of inefficiency and inefficacy.

In chapter 9, verses 13 to 14, the author introduces another lesser-to-greater argument based on the antithesis of animal blood versus Jesus' own blood in chapter 9, verse 12. By linking together the blood of bulls and goats with the sprinkled ashes of the heifer, the author blends together the sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement on Yom Kippur with the procedure outlined in Numbers 19 for the preparation of the substance that removes impurities contracted by corpse defilement, by touching a dead body. This association allows the author to advance his claim that the whole gamut of rites under the Old Covenant only had the power to deal with external defilement, being, as he puts it, regulations for the flesh that could not pierce through to the removal of the contamination of the conscience.

The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement are thus relegated to the level of external purification. If the material substance of animal blood is sufficient for the sanctification of the exterior person, the blood of Christ, the author argues, offered through eternal spirit will surely suffice for the cleansing of the interior person. We should note that, at this moment, a change in anthropology has been reflected in the author's distinction between the exterior person and the conscience of the inner person.

This is a move away from the more integrated ancient Israelite conception of the human being in which interior and exterior aspects of a person were not radically distinguished. The author has moved toward a more Hellenistic conception that sets the external and the internal facets of human beings alongside each other in contrast. It would not have occurred to the compilers of Leviticus to draw a line between the cleansing of the skin and cleansing the heart.

A single rite would cleanse the person. The author of Hebrews, stepping into history having the benefit of the prophetic critique of priestly ritual and also the benefit of centuries of Hellenization behind him, can now question Leviticus 16 verse 30 as to the degree of cleansing that the Day of Atonement rite provides and can conclude that it is a mere external rite. We need to remember here throughout this argument that the author is speaking about a crucifixion suffered out of obedience and faithfulness toward God.

We should not imagine Jesus actually taking blood into the heavenly places as if spiritual realities can be cleansed by materials of whatever quality. The author's awareness that Jesus' sacrifice takes place through eternal spirits may indicate that the author would not have us cling too tightly to the material aspects of Jesus' death as we ponder the effects of that death in these cultic terms. He uses objectifying

language like blood to assist his hearers in their appropriation of this good news in terms of what they would understand.

Jesus' death on our behalf and his ascension into God's presence mean that the believers have been accepted by God for Jesus' sake into God's household and enjoy the benefit of Jesus living and interceding for them at God's right hand. The language of the Old Testament cult provides a powerful language for grasping the fact that all obstacles standing between a holy God and unholy humanity have been removed. Jesus' death, therefore, happens on our behalf, but here we also see in a fresh way how Jesus' ascension is also something that happened on behalf of Jesus' followers.

In Hebrews 9, verses 15-22, the author returns to the language of the covenant to talk about Jesus' death not merely as the cosmic day of atonement but also as the rite that inaugurates the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31. The rite of covenant inauguration, as readers would know from Exodus 24, also requires the shedding of blood. Jesus' death thus does double duty, effecting atonement and serving as a covenant-initiating sacrifice.

On account of this, he is the mediator of a new covenant in order for a death to take place for the remission of sins committed against the first covenant, in order for those who are called to receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. Joining the words covenant with inheritance allows the author to begin to play on the dual meaning of the Greek word *diatheke* as both covenant and testament, that is to say, a will. In this way, he can hold together the affirmation of Jesus' death both as a covenant inauguration sacrifice and as the passing away of a testator, a will-maker, which enables the property of the testator to fall to the heirs, making God's will valid for those who have been named God's heirs.

As he continues in verse 16, where there is a covenant or a will, it is necessary to bring forward the death of the covenant-maker or the will-maker. Since God, of course, cannot die, Jesus' death is brought forward as the death that makes the law of inheritance effective for the heirs. The author weaves across the line between covenant and will again in verse 17, for a covenant is confirmed on the basis of dead bodies.

Since it does not have force while the testator lives, the introduction of dead bodies as the basis on which a covenant is confirmed or made binding recalls certain covenant-making sacrifices. For example, the covenant made between God and Abraham in Genesis 15, verses 9 through 21, was indeed established over dead bodies in the midst of animal corpses that Abraham had cleaved into the sign of God's oath to see his part of the covenant through on his life, as it were.

The author then veers back into topics of testamentary law as if to complete the braiding and intertwining of these two frameworks of meaning. The clause, since it,

that is to say, the covenant, does not have force while the testator lives, links the shedding of blood and death of a victim not only with atonement rituals but also with a covenant inauguration. And the conceit of the testamentary law helps the preacher make this point.

The main point the argument serves is that Christ's death accomplishes the inauguration of this covenant, which is spoken of in the Jeremiah quotation that the author had recited in Hebrews chapter 8. Hebrews 9 verses 18 to 22 then summarizes and modifies the ceremony of Exodus 24 verses 1 to 8. Therefore, neither was the first covenant inaugurated without blood, for after every commandment laid out in the law was communicated by Moses to all the people Moses, taking the blood of bulls with water and scarlet wool and hyssop sprinkled the book itself and all of the people saying this is the blood of the covenant which God decreed for you. And he sprinkled the tent and all the liturgical vessels with blood likewise. And nearly everything is cleansed with blood according to the law, and apart from bloodshed, there is no forgiveness.

The sprinkling with blood was a witness to the people and to God that the covenant was now binding on both parties since they had all agreed to it. The blood came from animals offered up as a peace offering. Sacrifices are performed with a view to securing God's favor for the people, assuring them of God's favor and, therefore, their well-being.

The preacher adds several details to the Exodus episode. The water, the scarlet thread, and the hyssop are not part of the covenant inauguration rite in Exodus 24. Neither is the sprinkling of the tent or of all the liturgical vessels.

As in Hebrews 9:13 our author is conflating rites from different places in the Torah prescribed for different occasions and purposes in order to stress both the exterior nature of these acts and, by virtue of having included many different rites in his comparison, the supersession of the whole cultic system in the one rite of the new covenant. The author has also modified slightly his recitation of Moses' words. In Exodus 24, verse 8, we would read Moses speaking, Behold the blood of the covenant.

But in Hebrews 9, 20 the author has Moses say This is the blood of the covenant. This latter phrase resonates much more closely with the words of the institution of the Last Supper known from the Synoptic Gospels, especially Matthew and Mark, where Jesus says this is my blood of the new covenant. Thus, the historical death of Jesus is weaved together more tightly into this covenant inauguration ritual.

The observation that Moses cleansed not only the people but also the sanctuary with the blood of bulls in Hebrews 9:21, just as the Levitical high priest did in the day of atonement, suggests to the author that the work of the greater high priest and

greater covenant mediator must also include a similar element leading to the next section of his argument on Christ's cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary with better blood beginning in Hebrews 9, verse 23. The presence of this ritual element in the prototype the Old Testament covenant inauguration ritual becomes evidence in effect for the accomplishment of the same element by Christ in the anti-type in the invisible realm. And so the author goes on to say without shedding blood, forgiveness does not come about. This maxim reflects the cardinal rule, the foundational rule of the Levitical priestly system, as we would read in Leviticus 17, 11: The blood is given for making atonement. Our author, however, holds this maxim alongside an affirmation he will shortly make at the beginning of chapter 10: It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to remove sins.

This tension, the necessity of blood to make atonement, and the impossibility of animal blood effectively removing sins together creates the necessity for what is, in effect, a human sacrifice to achieve remission of sins, a sacrifice supplied in the death of Jesus. This is something that the author has already hinted at in chapter eight, verse three. Every high priest is instituted for the offering of gifts and sacrifices, whence the necessity for this one also to have something to offer.

The nature of that offering will become much more the focus of the author's discussion in the sections that follow. The author closes what is now chapter nine of his sermon by dwelling on the cosmic and ritual significance of Jesus' ascension. And so we read, it was necessary on the one hand that the shadows of the realities in the heavens be cleansed by means of these sacrifices, but for the heavenly realities themselves to be cleansed with better sacrifices than these.

The preacher accepts the necessity of cleansing the earthly tabernacle with blood, which was a prominent feature of the Day of Atonement ritual, as well as of the covenant inauguration service. Again, we come across the notion of defilement building up in the holy of holies, the provocative reminder in God's presence of the sins of the people, and the need for the ritual purging of the same. If left unchecked, this buildup of reminders of the people's sins in God's presence in the holy place would result in disaster for the nation, either in the holiness of God breaking forth to burn up the defilement and its cause or in the holy God withdrawing from a polluted sanctuary and thus also withdrawing his protection and provision from the people.

The author of Hebrews constructs an antithesis in chapter nine, verse 23, which recalls the lesser to the greater argument of chapter nine, verses 13 and 14. Just as the new rites involved cleansing the conscience rather than just the exterior surface of the sinner with more effective blood, so the better sanctuary in the eternal realm is to be cleansed by means of the better blood as well. The defilement of the heavenly holy place represents the abiding reminder of human affronts against God before God's very throne.

Jesus' cleansing of the heavenly holy place is the ritual enactment of God's promise, I will remember their sins no more, articulated in Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 34. All of this then provides an interpretative framework for the ascension of Jesus, an aspect of the story of Jesus that tends not to play as large a role in Christian theologizing as his death and resurrection. As the author continues, Christ did not enter into the holy places crafted by hands, antitypes of the genuine articles, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God on our behalf.

Here, we observe a subtle switching of terminology on the author's part. Usually, the Old Testament provides the type or the prototype, and Jesus and his work provide the antitype. The type prefigures, the antitype follows and perfects that pattern.

In calling the earthly tabernacle the antitype, however, the author is reminding the hearers that the heavenly temple existed prior to the building of the earthly copy, indeed, prior to creation itself, as we heard in chapter eight, verse five. The relationship between the heavenly cult and the earthly rites is reversed at this point. The earthly rites are, in fact, mirroring the pattern of the heavenly cult.

The sanctuary served by Levitical priests is merely a copy made by human hands, while Jesus, by his ascension, has entered into the real thing, the true place of God's dwelling, and, therefore, the real or more effective place for mediation to happen. It is there that he removes the memory of sin from God's presence, the memory that has stained and constrained human access to the divine. The same act, on Jesus' part, accomplished the inauguration of the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah.

The connection between atonement and covenant is facilitated here by the fact that Jeremiah's new covenant is specifically about God remembering sins no longer. The death of Jesus is thus taken by our author as witnessing to both parties, to God and to humanity, that this new covenant is in effect. A testimony appropriately carried out in both Exodus 24 and here by the mediator of the covenant.

Thus, again, not only is Jesus' death for us, but also his ascension is for us. A third antithesis follows in Hebrews 9, verses 25 and 26, returning to the contrast between Jesus' single sacrifice and the annual repeated sacrifices of the Levitical high priest. Jesus entered heaven itself, quote, not in order to offer himself many times as the high priest enters the holy place annually with the blood of another; since then, it would have been necessary for him to suffer many times from the foundation of the world.

But now he has appeared at the consummation of the ages to do away with sin once and for all through his sacrifice. The preacher had already affirmed in chapter nine, verses seven to 14, that Jesus' once for all sacrifice accomplishes what the annual rites of the day of atonement could not. Now, he returns to this point of contrast to

develop it at greater length here and in the following paragraphs in chapter 10, verses one through 10.

The distinction here between the earthly high priests entering with another's blood, the blood of sacrificial animals, and Jesus' sacrifice of himself shows not only the greater quality of Jesus' sacrifice but also Jesus' greater degree of investment in this task of mediation. He literally poured himself out to restore his clients' access to God's favor. This should again serve to arouse gratitude and maintain gratitude on the part of the author's congregation.

It should also serve as a deterrent against disloyalty, against failing to make a fair return to so invested and self-giving a mediator. At this point, the eschatological dimension enters the cultic argument, as it will again in chapter 10, verse 13. Jesus' priestly act occurs not only within history but at the end of history.

He has appeared at the consummation of the ages. This reinforces the impression that the preacher seeks to make on his audience from the beginning to the end of this sermon. They stand at the threshold of their inheritance, of their entry into their rest, an unshakable kingdom.

The time for rewarding those who are loyal to Christ's rule and subjugating those hostile to the same is at the door. Christians have only to hold fast to their commitments for a very short while, as the author will say explicitly in chapter 10, verses 36 to 39. The author takes a moment to develop this eschatological dimension before returning to his cult-focused exposition.

Just as it is in store for human beings to die once, and after this, the judgment, so also Christ, having offered himself once in order to bear away the sins of many, will appear a second time without connection with sin for the salvation of those who are eagerly waiting for him. The maxim about death followed by judgment reinforces the author's strategic warning that leaving the group does not mean escaping danger. They will be held accountable no matter what by the God whose son they spurned.

Meeting the crisis of post-mortem judgment successfully should occupy the hearer's full attention rather than allowing their gaze to drift away out of concern for the relatively minor crises brought on by the hostility of their neighbors. Those who have received Jesus' costly act of beneficence and responded with loyalty and gratitude will enjoy the gift of deliverance, soteria, salvation at the time of Christ's coming, the second time. The use of the term salvation here is important.

Again, we see this author thinking of salvation as a future good as opposed to the use of the term in Ephesians 2, verses six to eight, for example, to describe an event located in the believer's past. The pastoral need that the author addresses, namely stimulating a forward-looking attitude that will endure to the end, is well-served by

calling the hearer's attention to this future dimension of God's deliverance or salvation of those who are in Christ Jesus. The authors of the writings of the New Testament speak of a breadth of experiences that together constitute the fuller process of salvation.

Reconciliation with God through accepting Christ, joining the people of God through baptism, walking in the newness of life, and being delivered from the cataclysm that will end this present evil age. Collapsing this larger understanding of God's saving work into any single facet weakens the impact that the biblical concept of salvation ought to have on Christians' lives, a concept that not only points us backward to what God has already done in our lives but also points us forward, making us long for what God will yet do for the faithful ones who continue to live out their response of gratitude and reverent obedience.