

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 8B, Hebrews 9:1-10:18: Christ our Atonement (Part 2), 6-min. Video Overview

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Today, we're going to tackle one of the most pivotal and, let's be honest, revolutionary arguments in the entire New Testament. It's right here in Hebrews chapter 10. You see, the writer builds this case that just completely upends the traditional understanding of sacrifice and our access to God.

It is a dense but absolutely brilliant piece of reasoning, and we're going to break it all down together. So the whole argument kicks off with this really powerful metaphor. The writer claims the law, and that means the entire religious system, wasn't the real thing, but merely a shadow.

Now think about that for a second. A shadow gives you the outline, right? It gives you a hint of what's there. But it's missing all the substance, the color, the detail, the true reality of the thing casting it.

That's the core idea here. The old system was just a signpost, pointing to something much more real that was still on its way. And right away, that sets up the central mystery for the rest of the chapter.

I mean, if centuries of sacred rituals, rituals given by God himself, were just a shadow, then what was the reality? What was the real thing they were all pointing to? The writer has just laid out a puzzle for us, and now we get to follow the clues to see how it all gets solved. Okay, so to get to the solution, the first step is to really nail down the problem. We've got to understand why the old system, you know, the shadow, was seen as fundamentally not enough.

And the case that gets built here is, well, it's fascinating. So here's the crucial point. Why did the sacrifices have to be offered over and over and over again, year after year? The logic here is pretty simple, but man, is it sharp.

If a sacrifice actually worked, if it could truly cleanse your conscience once and for all, you wouldn't have to keep doing it, right? The very fact that it was this perpetual annual ritual was, for this writer, the ultimate proof that it just wasn't getting the job done. And this is where the argument gets really radical. This passage takes the most sacred day of the entire Jewish year, the Day of Atonement, and completely reinterprets it.

I mean, the original law in Leviticus is crystal clear: the day is for cleansing. But the writer of Hebrews flips that idea completely on its head. The argument is that the ritual doesn't actually cleanse you at all.

Instead, it serves as an annual reminder of sin. It's a day that just highlights the problem over and over instead of actually solving it. So how is such a bold claim even justified? Well, it's through a kind of textual jiu-jitsu.

The writer finds this very specific kind of niche law back in the book of Numbers, where one particular sacrifice is offered to bring sins to remembrance. Then, that one principle is taken and applied to the entire sacrificial system. It's an incredibly creative and, you have to admit, provocative move, reframing the whole thing as something designed not to fix our failure, but just to remind us of it.

And all of this builds to the most shocking claim yet. Now look, this wasn't an entirely new idea. You had Old Testament prophets critiquing people who just went through the motions of ritual without a changed heart.

But this passage takes it a giant leap further. It goes from saying sacrifices are insufficient without obedience to saying they are fundamentally incapable of ever taking away sin. Period.

That's a bombshell. Alright, so after establishing the problem so powerfully, the argument pivots to the solution. If the old system is just a shadow, a constant reminder of failure, where in the world is the answer? Well, the writer finds it, as always, by digging back into scripture to find a key that unlocks the whole puzzle.

So the breakthrough doesn't come from some new improved ritual. It's not a bigger or better sacrifice. No, it comes from a completely different principle.

The focus shifts to Psalm 40, which is presented as revealing what God really wanted all along. And it wasn't animal sacrifice. It was perfect, willing obedience.

And here it is. This is the aha moment of the entire argument. You see, the writer of Hebrews was reading the scriptures in Greek, in a translation called the Septuagint.

And in that version, there's a really critical difference from the original Hebrew. While the Hebrew of Psalm 40 says, ears you have dug for me, which is a metaphor for hearing and obeying, the Greek version says, a body you prepared for me. This one little change in translation is the key that unlocks the entire case being built.

So the writer takes this line, a body you prepared for me, puts it in the mouth of Jesus and interprets it as a prophecy of the incarnation. The logic is that God didn't want the bodies of animals anymore. He was preparing a human body, Jesus' body, to be the one true offering that would finally fulfill his will through perfect obedience.

The logic is then laid out with like crystal clarity, arguing from scripture itself. So step one, the text shows God saying he's not happy with the old system of sacrifice. Step two, a new alternative shows up, a person who says, I've come to do your will.

And for the writer of Hebrews, the conclusion is just inescapable. God is setting aside the first system to make way for the second. The old is being replaced by the new and the proof is in the text itself.

Okay, so how does this all lead to a final resolution? If Jesus' offering was the true one, how can we be sure it actually worked and that it's complete? The writer gives us a simple yet incredibly profound image to prove the point. He sat down. I mean, that one little image says everything.

In the entire Old Testament system, there were no chairs in the tabernacle or the temple. And why not? Because a priest's work was never ever done. They always had to be standing, always ready for the next sacrifice.

This table just lays out the stark contrast so clearly, doesn't it? On one side, you've got the Levitical priests constantly standing because their work was repetitive and literally endless. On the other side, you have Jesus, the new High Priest, who, after a single all-sufficient offering, sits down. That posture of sitting, it signifies finality, authority, and completion.

His work is finished. So it all comes down to posture. Standing is the posture of a servant whose to-do list is never-ending.

But sitting, especially at the right hand of God, that's the posture of a king, a victor, whose work is totally complete and authoritative. The job is done. One.

Just one offering. That's the revolutionary math of Hebrews 10. A single, decisive act accomplished what millions of animal sacrifices over hundreds of years never could.

It perfected us forever. The system is complete. So what does all of this dense theology actually mean for us? Why does it matter? Well, the writer wraps it all up by explaining the profound, life-altering implications of this finished work.

See, you've got to remember, the entire Levitical system was built on limited access. Most people couldn't get anywhere near God's presence. Only certain priests could go in certain places.

And only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place. And even he could only do it once a year. The fundamental problem was distance.

And the solution, this text argues, is that Christ's finished work has torn down every single one of those barriers. And as the final piece of evidence, the writer brings in the Prophet Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant. Under this new reality, sins aren't just covered up.

They are totally forgiven and forgotten. And because of that, we get to the ultimate conclusion. There is no longer an offering for sins.

The system is closed. The need has been met once and for all. And this wasn't just some abstract theological idea.

This letter was written to a real community of people who were suffering and were actually thinking about giving up. The whole point of this long, complex argument was to say, hey, look at the incredible, unprecedented access you now have to God. Look at the finality of what's been done for you.

Don't you dare throw that away. This reality is the very foundation for their endurance. And that leaves us with a pretty provocative thought.

The central argument of Hebrews is that a whole system of religious hierarchy and endless ritual has been totally replaced by direct, unhindered access to God for everyone. So the question for us becomes, how might we, sometimes without even realizing it, rebuild the very barriers that this text argues were torn down for good? It's definitely a question worth thinking about.