

Jesus' Ministry and the Sanctuary



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 9 and 10.

MEMORY TEXT: “Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself” (Hebrews 7:27, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Hebrews uses images from both the daily and yearly services to show we have complete access to the Father.

WE HAVE ALREADY STUDIED THE SANCTUARY LANGUAGE of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We have also noticed that the author knows the old system very well. For him the earthly sanctuary is a shadow of the real heavenly sanctuary. In addition to the real tabernacle, there is a real sacrifice, which surpasses all animal sacrifices atoning for the sins of humanity. There is also a real priesthood.

Hebrews has some strong allusions to the Day of Atonement. What conclusions can we draw from those allusions? What conclusions are not warranted? This week we'll take a look at some texts and issues that are of special significance to Seventh-day Adventists.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does Hebrews talk about both the daily and yearly services? What is the meaning of “within the veil”? We say that Jesus is our High Priest in heaven, but what does that mean? What does He do for us as High Priest, as Intercessor and Mediator?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.

THE DAILY SERVICE IN HEBREWS.

“Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people” (Heb. 9:6, 7).

No question, the author of Hebrews used the Old Testament wilderness sanctuary and its sacrificial services as the model, the type, to help provide insights into Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Separated from that context, the verses about blood of goats and bulls, the tent, the veil, the high priest, and so forth make little sense. Paul used the earthly realities to explain heavenly ones; we should, as well.

Thus, it's not surprising that, in agreement with the Old Testament type, he distinguished between a ministry in the first compartment of the tabernacle, the Holy Place, and a ministry in the second apartment, the Most Holy Place. In the former, the priests and the high priest, serving on a daily basis, offered sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. In the Most Holy Place, the high priest made final atonement for—and cleansed the sanctuary from—sin (Leviticus 16). The daily seemed to deal with sin on an individual basis; in the yearly, the whole service took on a corporate component, dealing with the nation as a whole.

In Hebrews 9:7, the word translated “errors” comes from a Greek word that means sins committed through ignorance or thoughtlessness. What does the fact that even these kinds of sins needed to be atoned for tell us about just how serious they are?

In addition to Hebrews 9:6, the daily ministry in the earthly sanctuary is specifically mentioned in Hebrews 7:26, 27 and 10:11, 12. What's the one point that both are making as they compare the daily sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice? (See also Heb. 9:28.)

Of all the good news found in Hebrews, these texts contain some of the best, which is that Jesus' sacrifice was all-sufficient and complete. No more blood needs to be shed, no more animals need to be sacrificed, and no more deaths need to atone for sin. Christ's death was enough.

Read Hebrews 2:9. How does that text help us understand why Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice was sufficient?

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT IN HEBREWS.

Besides using images from the daily (or first-apartment) ministry, Hebrews uses images from the yearly ministry, the Day of Atonement, the climactic sanctuary ritual of the year. This shouldn't be surprising, because a book finding its basic types from the earthly-sanctuary service hardly would be expected to ignore one of the most solemn sanctuary rituals.

Besides Hebrews 9:7, references to the Day of Atonement may be found very clearly in Hebrews 9:25, 26 and 10:1-4. As with the references to the daily (see yesterday's study), what's the main point the texts are making, and how does that point fit in with the entire theme of Hebrews that we have looked at so far?

Another fascinating text with Day of Atonement overtones is Hebrews 9:23. "Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (NASB). After reading the text in context, ask yourself this question: Given the overall contrasts being made in the book of Hebrews, particularly in chapter 9, what are the "heavenly things" that need cleansing?

Following a passage on the dedication of the sanctuary, this text argues that just as the earthly things (i.e., the earthly sanctuary and all that was in it) require purification, the "heavenly things" (the sanctuary in heaven) do, as well. Except that, in this case, the heavenly cleansing demanded "better sacrifices." It's no coincidence that the word translated "cleansed" is used in Leviticus 16 to describe the purification of the sanctuary at the Day of Atonement. The author sees the earthly ritual as a symbol of something better in heaven.

Though Hebrews does not elaborate more on this theme and does not say *when* these "heavenly things" are or would be cleansed (for example, either at the Cross or beginning in 1844), what it does do is affirm the Adventist teaching that not only is there a sanctuary in heaven but that it needs to be "purified" or "cleansed." How do you understand this verse in the context of our 1844 sanctuary message?

WITHIN THE VEIL.

Read Hebrews 6:13-20. What hope is the author giving to his readers? What seems to be the point of this discourse?

There's been much discussion over the years regarding the phrase "within the veil." Because this phrase is used almost exclusively (though not always; see Num. 18:7) as a reference for the Most Holy Place in the Hebrew Bible, some have tried to argue on the merit of this verse that Hebrews has put Jesus in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, thus voiding the 1844 message.

In Hebrews 9:3, the phrase "second veil" refers to the veil between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary. The question arises, Why didn't he use that same phrase in Hebrews 6:19 if he meant, specifically, the second apartment?

It is rather suspect that the author of Hebrews didn't use the phrase "second veil" here; the obvious phrase he meant the text to mean was the second veil; that is, the inner veil that stood before the Most Holy Place. In fact, there is nothing in the immediate context of Hebrews 6:19, 20 that alludes to the Day of Atonement. More than likely, considering the whole context of the book, the phrase alludes to our complete access to God in the heavenly sanctuary.

Again, the author is using Old Testament imagery to teach New Testament truths regarding the greater efficacy of Christ's death and high-priestly ministry, one that gives us "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast," in contrast to the old, inefficient Levitical system.

There's no question that all the sacrifices, including those of the Day of Atonement, had their fulfillment in Jesus at the Cross. Yet, to focus exclusively on this phrase is to miss the whole point of Hebrews, which is that through Jesus all barriers between God and humanity have been broken and that through Christ's death and mediation we now have full access to the Father. That verse, along with other Day of Atonement images (interestingly enough, no mention is made in Hebrews of the scapegoat, a key element in the yearly service), doesn't prove that the Day of Atonement ritual itself was fulfilled at the Cross. Hebrews doesn't address that issue.

Dwell on Hebrews 6:18, 19, focusing on such words as "immutable," "refuge," "anchor," "steadfast," and "sure." Rephrase the two texts in your own words in a way that helps you understand the hope the author is trying to give us.

OUR HEAVENLY INTERCESSOR.

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Perhaps, in many ways, the key theme of Hebrews can be found in the simple phrase within this text: that He can save to the uttermost those who “come unto God by him.” The Greek word translated “by” here means “through” or “by the means of.”

We must, again, remember the purpose of the epistle: Paul is telling these people, Don’t go back to your old ways. The new way offers something much better, something that can accomplish what the old never could. The new way offers you the opportunity to come to God as you never could before. And that’s because you now can come to God through, or by the means of, Jesus.

What does it mean to come to God “by him,” that is, through Jesus? Write down your understanding of what Jesus has done so that we can, through Him, come to God. What texts can you find to back up your answer? Also, what does it mean to come to God?

No question, its through Christ as your great High Priest that we can have access to God. But how? How can we, as sinners, have access to a holy God?

Of course, we don’t (at least not now) stand in the physical presence of God. But we don’t have to. Someone else does it for us, and that’s Jesus, who by virtue of His perfect life stands before the Father—for us. He stands *in our place*, representing us, not because of our own worth but because of His. He alone has the perfect righteousness to stand in the presence of the Father.

Just as in the daily and the yearly service in the old covenant the priests entered into the presence of God in the sanctuary, Jesus does so for us in the heavenly sanctuary. He is our Representative there, doing for us what we can never do for ourselves.

Read Romans 8:34; Hebrews 6:20; 9:24; 10:20. What is the one similar point they are all making? What hope, what promises, are found there for us?

OUR HEAVENLY MEDIATOR.

Look up the texts below. What are they all saying to us? What do they mean for us? What is your understanding of a mediator? Why do we need one?

1 Tim. 2:5 _____

Heb. 8:6 _____

Heb. 9:15 _____

Heb. 12:24 _____

Jesus as Mediator cannot be separated from Jesus as Sacrifice and Jesus as our High Priest. All are part of the same plan of salvation. By virtue of His perfect life and complete sacrifice, Jesus now stands as our High Priest in heaven, where He stands in the presence of God for us as our Mediator.

In the old covenant–sanctuary service, the priest would take the blood of animals and bring it into the earthly sanctuary. He would, as a representative of others, go where others could not go. The priests would have to do this day after day in the daily service, year after year in the heavenly service.

Under the new covenant, instead of earthly and sinful priests, we have Jesus, the Mediator of “a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” Sinners today don’t have to find an animal, don’t have to bring it to an earthly sanctuary, and don’t need another sinner to mediate that blood for them. Mediation is being done for us through Jesus, through whom we can have access to God at any time, at any place.

When we sin, we confess our sins, and Jesus, because of His merits, His perfect righteousness, stands “in the presence of God for us,” representing us, not with our righteousness but with His own, the merits that He Himself wrought out for us while here in the flesh, the merits that become ours by faith. In short, He’s applying in our behalf the benefits of His perfect life and death, the only means by which we, as sinners, can be accepted by God.

Read 1 John 2:1 in light of today’s study. How does this text fit in with the whole theme of Hebrews? You need to be able to see the great hope and promises we have, knowing that “Jesus Christ the Righteous” intercedes for us, that He stands in God’s presence for us, and that He is our Mediator. Dwell on these themes until you grasp their importance for you personally.

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, pp. 188–212.

“All is terror and confusion. The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God’s Son. The great sacrifice has been made. The way into the holiest is laid open. A new and living way is prepared for all. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest. Henceforth the Saviour was to officiate as priest and advocate in the heaven of heavens.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 757.

“By the rending of the veil of the temple, God said, I can no longer reveal My presence in the most holy place. A new and living Way, before which there hangs no veil, is offered to all. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest.”
—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1109.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at these Ellen White quotes in light of this week’s lesson. How do they harmonize with our understanding of Christ’s two-phased ministry in heaven?
2. After much study by some of our best scholars, a report was given on Hebrews. Two questions were asked. Does Hebrews teach Christ’s two-phased priestly ministry? Does Hebrews deny Christ’s two-phased priestly ministry? The committee answered No to both questions. Discuss the implications of their answer.
3. Hebrews is very clear that the earthly and heavenly sanctuary are closely tied together. Though we don’t want to make an exact comparison, demanding that every stick of furniture in the earthly must have a corresponding counterpart in heaven, why does the reality of a two-phased earthly ministry—which was so crucial to the function of that sanctuary—provide powerful biblical evidence for a two-phased heavenly ministry, as well?

SUMMARY: The book of Hebrews, using the old covenant–sanctuary service as its model, employs images from the daily and yearly services. All these point to the greater, better hope we have in Jesus, our Intercessor, Mediator, and High Priest in heaven.



It Started With a Song

Charlotte Ishkanian

René and José and two other members of their church in Chile, South America, accepted the challenge to start a small group in a difficult and isolated area. The four lay workers had no car, so they took a bus as far as they could, then walked an hour to the first home. They found the people eager for spiritual guidance.

One day as they walked along the road, the men stopped to rest and wait for the women, who were a little behind them. While they waited, René pulled out his guitar, and they started singing.

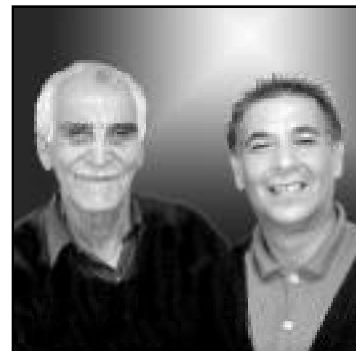
They noticed a movement in the bushes. A woman stepped out of the bushes and walked toward them. The men stood to greet her. “You are an answer to my prayer!” she said, her voice filled with emotion. “This morning I prayed that God would send someone to tell me about Him, and He has sent you! I have felt so alone, and I need God.” Tears streaked the woman’s face. By this time the two women had caught up with René and José. The four offered to visit and pray with Margarita.

A few minutes later another woman approached and joined the group. “Please pray for me, too,” the second woman, Carmen, said. Then she invited the four Adventist layworkers to visit her in her home, to teach her and pray with her.

The Adventists made many friends in the area. They needed a central place to worship, and chose to meet under some fruit trees.

More people heard about the spiritual meetings and joined the group for worship. Soon the three benches were not enough to hold everyone. Winter was coming, and the group needed to find a place to meet out of the winter rain. They began praying for a place, and in a few days a woman volunteered her little house during the winter. Soon they will begin raising funds to build a small chapel.

At present some 25 people come to their meetings. Of these, 12 have been baptized. And it all started with a song.



René Astudillo and José Gonzalez (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

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