

The Book of Hebrews Study Guide

Hebrews 10

The superiority of Yeshua's sacrifice (10:1-18)

- v. 1 – The author brings out the insufficiency of the Torah by using similar terms to the way that he demonstrated the insufficiency of the earthly tabernacle. Just as he called the tabernacle a shadow of the heavenly holy place in 8:5, he calls the Torah a “shadow of the good things to come.” Shadows in the real world are, in fact, useful. They help us to know where an actual object is located. And we can make decisions based on that information, like knowing where to find something or recognizing that you may need to get out of the way. In that regard, like a shadow, Torah sacrifices were useful because they identified what was sinful and that there were consequences for those sins (Rom 7:7).

The good things to come refers primarily to the perfect sacrifice of the Messiah that inaugurated the New Covenant. Previously, we saw that *skia*, the Greek word for shadow has the sense of a similarity in form, but not identical in substance. The sacrificial aspect of the Torah and Yeshua were similar in form in the sense that a life was given for the sins of people.

- vv. 1-4 – We are then given a description of the difference in substance between the sacrificial aspects of the Torah and Yeshua. Torah sacrifices had inferior substance for the following reasons:

- They do not perfect people (v. 1).
- They have to be offered without ceasing (v. 2).
- They left a consciousness of sin – people knew that as soon as they committed it again, they would return to a state of unforgiveness (v. 2).
- The continual sacrifices were a constant reminder that sin was always a problem (v. 3).
- Animal sacrifice only covered sin; it did not remove it (v. 4; cf. 9:26).

Most branches of Judaism today do not acknowledge the necessity of blood sacrifice as a means of dealing with sin. This belief can be traced to the formulation of modern Judaism while in Babylonian captivity and the influence of Zoroastrianism on their thinking. Rabbinic Judaism set aside biblical atonement for sin through sacrifice and adopted the Zoroastrian practice of doing good works as a basis for receiving blessings from God. Like Zoroastrianism, Jewish sages in Babylon taught the importance of doing *mitzvot* (“good deeds”) and practicing ethical behavior instead of maintaining the need for atonement and sacrifice, all of which continues forward to today.

The problem with that way of thinking is that God never annulled His requirement for substitutionary atonement. He never declared that a life no longer has to be given because of sin. So unless you are a perfect human being who never sins, you are putting yourself at great spiritual risk, even though you might feel safe, because you are going along with a decision made by human beings that actually belongs to God alone. The great distinction, then, between rabbinic Judaism and Messianic Judaism/Christianity is that the former abandoned the biblical principle, while the latter waited upon God for a better form of the principle, one that was perfect because it solved the problem of sin once for all.

vv. 5-8 – The author quotes from Psalm 40:6-8, written by David. The declaration that God does not desire “sacrifice and offering” (v. 5) and takes “no pleasure” from burnt offerings (v. 6) is not an annulment of the need for atonement. It is comparable to a parent disciplining a child, but not being happy about having to do it. Death is never preferable to the One who created life itself. But allowing it as even a temporary solution to sin was for the benefit of humans who are created in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26). And it confirmed the need for a better way in which animals were not involved at all and instead, God was directly involved.

v. 9 – The first and the second refers to the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and the New Covenant. This is a recurrence of the writer’s previous use of the terms in 8:7. We are told here that God “takes away” the old covenant. That is actually a rather timid and polite translation. The Greek word *anairēō* is only used in this manner twice in Scripture. Twenty other times it is translated as “kill, slay or put to death.” This terminology conveys the sense of the Mosaic covenant and all of its sacrifices being given a death sentence by God and no longer serving a purpose in His redemptive plan. As verse 7 brings out, this was the will of God.

v. 10 – The Hebrew verb *kadash*, translated as “sanctify,” literally means to “set apart or separate.” The Greek equivalent, *hagiazō*, from a root for holiness, emphasizes the result of being set apart. In other words, being set apart or separate from all things that are unrighteous or sinful makes us holy. That is all wrapped up in the concept of sanctification.

You will frequently hear in Judaism that God’s commandments sanctify us. But there is no place in Scripture that makes such an affirmation. Today we are only sanctified by the “offering of the body of Yeshua the Messiah once for all” (cf. Acts 26:18). This does not mean that God’s commandments are meaningless. Perhaps one way to look at it is that because we are sanctified by Yeshua and indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the same time, we are better able to live out God’s commandments regarding righteous living. Or another way of saying it is that we obey God’s commandments *because* we are sanctified by Yeshua.

vv. 11-14 – The author summarizes the distinctions between the Levitical ministry and that of Yeshua. The verb tense of verse 11 is in the present. That is an indicator that the temple had not yet been destroyed. The fact that the priests were still standing and Yeshua had sat down is significant because, according to the Torah, priests were required to stand during their time of service (Num 8:13; 16:9; Deut 18:3-7). The fact that they are still standing means that their work is unfinished. Yeshua, on the other hand, completed His sacrificial ministry, and has been sitting down positionally ever since. That means His work is finished. And by quoting once again from Psalm 110, the writer is affirming the kingly position of Yeshua, in contrast to servants who were still standing and working.

Verse 14 is a powerful statement regarding the assurance of salvation. The verb translated as perfected (*telio 'ō*) is in the perfect tense and the active voice. That indicates past action with ongoing results. That means the result of Yeshua’s sacrifice, which is our salvation, continues on indefinitely. And to add emphasis to that quality, he adds the words, “for all time.” That is something that is truly perfect, to our great benefit.

vv. 15-18 – The author repeats the latter portion of the prophecy of the New Covenant from Jeremiah 31. His purpose is to reaffirm the finality of the sacrifice by Yeshua that

inaugurated the New Covenant, namely that God will no longer remember their sins. Biblically speaking, God remembrance of something means that He acts on the reality of the information. When He remembers His covenant with Abraham, for example, He acts on it by preserving the Jewish people (cf. Ex 2:24; Ps 105:8; 106:45). Thus remembering someone's sins means divine punishment for them, and if you are not under the New Covenant, you are still liable for your sins, and that is a very grave position to be in. But believers in Yeshua, and thus those who are under the New Covenant, have the promise of no divine punishment because their sins are no longer remembered. That's how critical this distinction is.

Does that make this an unjust way of doing things? Is there no punishment whatsoever for sin? Not at all. Yeshua is the one who took our punishment in our place. Thus justice was maintained

The author's statement in verse 18 that there is no longer any offering for sin means that since the perfect offering has been given, it will never be repeated. God is simply not accepting anything else.

Godly living under the New Covenant (10:19-39)

vv. 19-21 – In the last chapter, the author showed how Yeshua entered the heavenly holy of holies by virtue of His shed blood. Now he shows how believers have the same access, again by virtue of His blood. Back in 9:8, he recognized that the Holy Spirit had inspired him with all of these disclosures. Up until this time, it had not been revealed that God had changed the way of access to God's presence in the holy of holies. Both Yeshua and Paul gave some general references of access to the Father through Yeshua (Jn 14:6; Eph 2:18; 3:12). Only in the book of Hebrews are we given this revelation of actual access to the throne of God by virtue of the blood of Yeshua.

v. 22 – The subject matter shifts to practical applications based on the understanding of what Yeshua has accomplished. The first exhortation toward godly living is to “draw near” to the holy place (referring to the place of God's dwelling). Having access to the holy place would have been considered a priceless possession in those days. But today it can be a privilege that is easily taken for granted. Believers can trivialize our direct access to God and forget to go to Him with our praises and concerns, thus living like we are unbelievers who just go about our lives without a continual communion with the Lord.

There is also a proper way to draw near to the Lord. This verse calls for such people to do so with “a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

v. 23 – The next exhortation is to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering?” Instead of hope, the KJV uses “faith.” The problem with that rendering is that in the 53 other places in the New Testament where the Greek word *elpis* appears, the KJV translates it as “hope.” So it makes sense to render it as “hope” here as well.

What is this hope that the people are being called to hold fast to? In 3:6, the author calls upon his audience to “boast of our hope firm until the end,” which suggests staying firm until Yeshua returns. Among the 53 uses of *elpis*, a great percentage of them have to do with having a hope in the return of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6; 24:15;

26:6; Rom 8:20; 1 Thes 4:13; Tit 2:13). It is all about not just having an expectation of the return of Messiah and the resurrection, but confessing it or telling others about it.

- v. 24 – The word translated as stimulate (NASB), provoke (KJV) or spur (NIV) does not mean nudge or encourage. It literally means, “to cause to convulse” or “to have a sudden violent emotion or action.” It is a call to “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” by being strong and assertive about engaging everyone in healthy relationships and serving the community. This is about battling against apathy. And the idea is that until Messiah returns, we should not be apathetic about our involvement in ministry.
- v. 25 – This verse is often used as a motivation for getting people to go to church. But is that what the author is getting at here? As in any passage of Scripture, accurate interpretation requires understanding the grammar and the way it is used in the greater context of Scripture, then the immediate context of the verse and those preceding and following it.

The Greek word *episunagōgē* is translated as “assembling together” (NASB), “assembling of ourselves” (KJV), “meeting together” (NIV), and “congregational meetings” (CJB). It is a rather unique word. It literally means, “a complete gathering.” Some have said this is a reference to the complete gatherings of the people of Israel for the feasts. But that does not fit the way it is used contextually. It is used only one other place in Scripture:

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Messiah Yeshua and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come” (2 Thes 2:1-2).

Clearly, in this passage, *episunagōgē*, translated as “gathering together,” is used regarding the return of Messiah. The verb form of the word, *episunagō*, is used by Yeshua to describe His desire for people to be gathered to Him (Mat 23:37; Lk 13:34), people actually being gathered to Him (Mk 1:33; Lk 12:1), and the gathering of the elect at the end of the age (Mat 24:31; Mk 13:27). That is the only way that the verb form is used. So nowhere in the Bible is the noun or verb used regarding meeting for worship. It is all about people being literally gathered to the presence of Yeshua. That is the greater context of Scripture.

What about the immediate context in Hebrews? Verse 25 goes on to show that believers are called to encourage one another “as you see the day drawing near.” It makes no sense to say that this is to be applied to weekly worship, such as realizing that the weekend is at hand and you have to encourage someone to come and worship. While that is definitely a good thing to do, that is not what the passage is saying. The use of the definite article—“the day” means it is a very special day. Contextually, “the day” connects back to the hope of verse 23, referring to the return of Messiah.

In verses 35-37 the author gives a very similar exhortation for endurance until Yeshua comes again. So if he wanted to emphasize congregational attendance, it seems much more appropriate for him to use the word *ekklesia*, which is the normal word for congregations.

All things considered, verse 25 is a call for the audience of Hebrews not to give up on the hope of the return of Yeshua and being gathered to Him. But some people in this body were vulnerable to giving up that hope. So he is telling them to encourage one another in that regard.

- vv. 26-27 – Whenever a verse begins with “for” (Gr. *gar*), it is a description of the result of the previous statement. In other words, the author is saying that if you lose hope, here is what will happen. The people in verse 26 who have received the knowledge of the truth are those who have heard the full gospel—that Yeshua came as the prophets foretold and died for our sins, and that He will return in a very special day, and bringing about the resurrection of the dead.
- But rejecting the return of Messiah is tantamount to rejecting the entire gospel, for all of these things are part of God’s redemptive plan. That kind of rejection is the greatest sin of all because it denies the truth about Yeshua. And the author is warning that from God’s perspective, you have no other sacrifice that will forgive that sin. What remains is only a terrifying judgment. That meaning is much more consistent with facing fiery judgment for not going to church. So this verse is not about ordinary sin.
- vv. 28-29 – The author employs another *kal v’homer* argument (“light and heavy”). If violating the Mosaic Covenant brought physical death (light), violating or rejecting the New Covenant will bring spiritual death (heavy). The word in verse 29 translated as “unclean” (NASB), “holy thing” (KJV, NIV), is *koinos*. It literally means “common” (translated that way in the CJB). So the author is referring to the kind of people who say that the death of Yeshua has no great significance for them personally, and that His death is common—it is just like that of anyone else, even if it may have been tragic or unjustified. It just has no meaning for them personally. This the writer is calling that the ultimate insult. These great consequences are the ultimate reason behind the author’s concern about people in his intended audience returning to Levitical Judaism. By doing so, they would be treating the death of Yeshua as having no special significance—just a common death.
- vv. 30-31 – The seriousness of this rejection of the New Covenant is brought out in the next two verses. He quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35-36 and Psalm 135:14. Today it is unpopular to bring up the judgment of God. In part, many people do not consider God to be alive or at best involved in this world. But the silence of God should never be interpreted as non-existence or lack of involvement. And that assumption comes with great risk.
- vv. 32-36 – The audience is given a reminder of their personal history. After they were enlightened (received the gospel), they endured persecution in a number of ways. Yet their response was commendable. They kept on doing ministry and were willing to endure the loss of their possessions because they recognized that they possessed something far greater that is eternal in nature. But now, things have changed. They had become susceptible to drifting away and returning to Levitical Judaism and they had become worn down because, according to verse 36, they lacked endurance.
- vv. 37-38 – He quotes from Habakkuk 2:3-4 in order to show the solution to a lack of endurance—trusting in the coming again of Messiah. Since He can come at any time, it motivates us to be found faithful in that moment, just like the parable of the virgins whose lamps were ready for His coming in Matthew 25. Living righteously by faith also helps to give us endurance. When difficult times come, simply making a commitment to trust in God will get us through that day, and then again the next day, and so on. It’s all about making a conscious decision and then trusting in God to do the rest.
- v, 39 – This section of Hebrews concludes with a final exhortation not to shrink or draw back, but to exercise faith and thus preserve our souls, which has the sense of eternal life.