

## The Book of Hebrews Study Guide

### Chapter 9

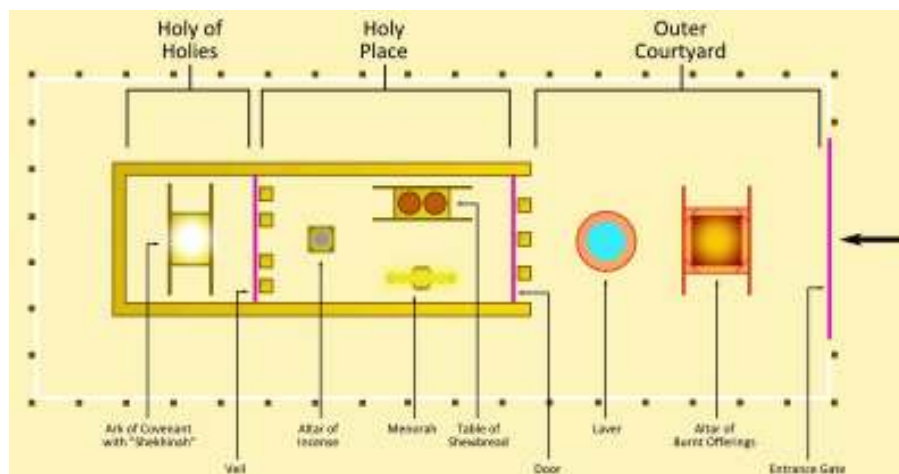
After showing how the priestly ministry of Yeshua in administering the New Covenant is superior to the Levitical ministry of the Mosaic Covenant, the author now shows how specific elements of the heavenly holy place are superior to its copy on earth.

#### The characteristics of the Levitical sanctuary (9:1-5)

- v. 1 – He begins by describing the earthly sanctuary/holy place (Gr. *hagios*) where the Mosaic Covenant was carried out.
- v. 2 – Notice that he makes his comparison to the tabernacle, not the temple. It had been over one thousand years (from 966 B.C.) since Israel had used the tabernacle for worship. And the temple was fully operational at the time of the writing of Hebrews.

He compares the heavenly holy place to the one that was in the tabernacle, not the temple, because it was the copy of the original shown to Moses, and it was the structure used for the original enactment of the Mosaic Covenant. He wants to show the superiority of Messiah's ministry and that means having to connect with the original context of Moses. In addition, making a comparison to the tabernacle avoids distractions associated with the existing temple. The use of the tabernacle was not insignificant either. It was the place of worship for the people of Israel for nearly five centuries. There is also one more reason, as we will see shortly.

- vv. 3-6 – The author then mentions the furnishings that God commanded Moses to build as copies of the furnishings in heaven (Ex 25).



In the outer part, the area called the holy place, closest to the entrance, was the menorah/lampstand on the left (Ex 40:24) and the table of sacred bread (also called the bread of the Presence or KJV, showbread) on the right (Ex 40:22).

In addition to the practical usage of the menorah as the source of light for the tabernacle, since the light was to burn continually, it symbolized the continual presence of God among His people.

The bread also represented God's continual presence (the name literally means, "bread of the face"). But in this case, it symbolizes His desire to fellowship with people, coupling His presence with His provision.

Further in the holy place is the gold altar of incense. It stood right outside the veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies. At first glance, it appears that the writer to Hebrews places it inside the holy of holies, but that would contradict Exodus 40:26 which places that altar in front of the veil. The word in Hebrews 9:4 translated as "having" (KJV, "which had") is the Greek term *echo* in the participle form. This usage conveys the sense of "belonging to" or "in association with" something. In other words, it is about the theological connection between the altar of incense and the holy of holies, not its location. And we know that there was an important connection on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) when the high priest would bring incense into the holy of holies (Lev 16:12-13).

Inside the holy of holies was the ark of the covenant. As verse 5 brings out, its lid was called the mercy seat and it had two golden cherubim facing each other. Between them was where the *Shekhinah* glory of God dwelled (Ex 25:22). And that is where the high priest met the Lord once a year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat as the atonement for the sins of the people (Lev 16:14-15). The mercy seat represented the throne of God, because kings sat on thrones, and they are the ones who give mercy. As Psalm 80:1 declares, Adonai is "enthroned above the *cherubim*."

The artifacts inside the ark were also symbolic. The jar of manna represented God's daily provision of the needs of the people. Aaron's rod that budded represented God's power. It was the tool that was used to demonstrate God's power when the Israelites were released from slavery in Egypt. It served as a reminder of His power later on when God instructed Moses to put the rod in front of the tablets of the Law in order to stop the people from grumbling (Num 17:10). The stone tablets with the ten commandments contained in the ark are called here "the tables of the covenant." They represented the Mosaic Covenant, including the commandments requiring blood sacrifice for sin, as well as our awareness of sin (Rom 7:7).

This brings us to the other reason why the author is comparing the heavenly holy place to the one that was in the tabernacle, not the temple. At the time of the book of Hebrews the holy of holies was empty. The ark of the covenant and its contents had been lost and were irreplaceable.

This was not the first change, however. 1 Kings 8 describes how the ark of the covenant was brought into the holy of holies in the first temple built by King Solomon:

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt (1 Ki 8:9).

The pot of manna and Aaron's rod were no longer present. As organic matter, it is unlikely that the manna would have lasted nearly 500 years. Aaron's rod was retained in order to remind the people of God's power and to stop grumbling, and in the wilderness the people would get that reminder whenever they had to move to a new location. But once the permanent temple was built, Aaron's rod would never be seen again. They had both lost their purposes. The stone tablets, however, endured both physically and purposefully, since the Mosaic Covenant was in full force, thus maintaining its inclusion as the only artifact in the ark during the first temple.

In the second temple, the ark itself was not there. That is brought out in Ezra 3. In Jeremiah 3:16 the prophet foretold that when the people returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple, the ark would be lost and never built again. The high priests during the second temple period continued to follow the commandments on Yom Kippur as closely as possible. But instead of sprinkling blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, they sprinkled it on the foundation stone inside the holy of holies that was also part of the first temple (*Mishnah, Yoma 5:2*). The most important thing for us to recognize is that the real ark was never lost. It has been in heaven all this time (see Rev 11:19).

The point is that in order to compare the earthly worship with the heavenly fulfillment, the setting had to be the tabernacle, not the temples because that was the only time when all of the elements were in place. But the earthly sanctuary, which was a copy, degraded over time. Only the original heavenly sanctuary retained its complete character. And that made it superior.

### **The characteristics of the Levitical service (9:6-10)**

- v. 6 – It is in the setting of the first five verses of the chapter that the author describes the priests continually “performing the divine worship” in the outer tabernacles, which is the holy place. Twice a day, every day, the oil of the menorah had to be replenished and the wicks trimmed (Ex 20:20-21). On every Sabbath, the priests would stand at the table of sacred bread and eat twelve loaves of bread. Then fresh bread was brought in and placed on the table where it would remain until the next Sabbath. And that went on week after week. The coals of the golden altar of incense had to be constantly replaced. All of these things required a constant changing of priests, who served specific times of the year according to their particular order. And so it went, without end.
- v. 7 – The focus shifts to the service related to the holy of holies. The service performed there was also continual. It was not every day, but once a year on Yom Kippur, so it still had to be repeated.

When we consider the Levitical service in both the outer holy place and the inner holy of holies, it was an imperfect system for several reasons:

- It never ended because the commandments for dealing with sin were always in force and people were always sinning.
- It was also vulnerable to not being able to carry out the requirements, such as when the people went into captivity and when the second temple was destroyed. In those times, there was no way to satisfy God’s commandments and the people remained guilty. That describes today as well.
- The way into God’s presence was restrictive in a number of ways. Common people could enter the courtyard, but not the holy place. Priests could enter the holy place, but not the holy of holies. The high priest could enter the holy of holies, but only once a year.

Altogether, the need for constant repetitions, the vulnerability, and the restrictions made it an inferior way of serving Adonai and being in fellowship with Him.

- vv. 8-10 – The author argues that as long as the physical structure of the sanctuary is standing, it is a symbol of imperfect service. Thus it would remain only “until a time of reformation” (v. 10). That is a reference to the New Covenant and the service of Yeshua as high priest.

The Greek word translated as “reformation” (NIV, “new order,” CJB, “reshape”) is *diorthōsis*. It is one of 154 words that only the writer to Hebrews uses. It literally means a situation that you get right. That does not mean God got it wrong with the Levitical way of service. It served its purpose as a symbol that could be perfected.

Besides addressing the issue of having to repeat services over and over again, verse 9 describes the tabernacle/temple service as needing to be perfected because it only cleansed people from defilement because of sin. It was incapable of changing the inner nature of people, or as the author writes here, making people “perfect (lit. ‘complete’) in conscience.” Something better was needed, and that is the subject of the remainder of the chapter.

### **The superiority of the priestly service of Yeshua (9:11-28)**

- v. 11 – The place of Yeshua’s service in the heavenly sanctuary is superior because it was “not made with hands and not of this creation.” It would endure because it is supernatural and not subject to decay.
- v. 12 – The sacrificial blood of Yeshua is also superior to the animal blood of Levitical sacrifice. Yeshua and animals were both substitutes, but as a human, Yeshua fully represented humanity, and as one who never sinned, He represented perfect innocence. It made His sacrifice unable to be improved upon. And that meant He needed only to enter the holy of holies one time.
- vv. 13-14 – The author brings out the superior way in which the service of Messiah deals with our inner conscience, unlike the inadequacy of the Levitical service back in verse 9. The author employs a method of rabbinic reasoning known as *kal v’homer*, meaning “light and heavy” or “simple and complex.” It was a common way of communicating in biblical times emphasizing that if something is true in a light or simple way, it will also be true in a heavy or complex way. In this case, the light or simple aspect is the cleansing of defiled flesh. The heavy or complex is the cleansing of our conscience. In other words, it is more significant for people to be cleansed on the inside than on the outside. And that is what happens when we believe in Yeshua.
- v. 15 – The author returns to the realization of the New Covenant that was addressed in chapter 8, showing that the sacrifice of Yeshua brings about redemption from sin. The biblical concept of redemption has the sense of something being paid in full, while the Mosaic Covenant could only cover sin temporarily. And He brings an eternal inheritance, while the Torah only dealt with matters on earth.
- vv. 16-17 – The author addresses a standard element of covenants in the Ancient Near East—their inauguration by sacrifice. But first, let us be clear that these verses are talking about covenants. Instead, some translations use “testament” or “will.” The Greek word is *diatheke*. It literally means, “making an appointment through.” It has the sense of a legal agreement in which certain things are appointed or granted. It is the word used in the Septuagint to translate *b’rit*, clearly meaning “covenant,” a formal agreement that had specific characteristics in the Ancient Near East. In that culture, there was no concept of wills as we know today. The Torah prescribed how land was to be inherited, so there was no allowance for individual determinations. So the use of the word “will” is a modern projection back onto biblical culture.

Then there is the matter of consistency. *Diatheke* is used twice in v. 15, and once each in 16-18. Yet some translations use “covenant” in 15 and 18, but “will” in 16 and 17. And the KJV is also inconsistent in its usage by using “testament” every time in this chapter, but “covenant” every time in chapter 8,10,12,13. Grammatically and contextually, this passage is specifically about covenants.

What then does it mean that there must be “the death of the one who made it?” Every covenant in the Ancient Near East was inaugurated or ratified with the death of one or more animals that represented the parties under the obligation of the covenant. The animal represented your own life. In the case of the Abrahamic Covenant, a number of animals were sacrificed and God symbolically passed through them, thus obligating Himself to the covenant. In the case of the Mosaic Covenant, sacrificed animals in place of people secured the benefits of the covenant. And in the case of the New Covenant, it was Yeshua who both made the covenant and ratified it through His own death, not substitutes representing His life. That’s what makes it unique. The point here, as verse 17 brings out, the New Covenant did not go into effect until Yeshua died.

vv. 18 – This next verse confirms that he has been talking about covenants, not wills. He states that the first/Mosaic Covenant was dedicated (KJV) or inaugurated (NASB) or “put into effect” (NIV) with blood. That means sacrificial death. The Greek word here (*enkainizo*) is the same word used to translate the Hebrew word *hanukkah* (see Jn 10:22 where it is used as “dedication”). Hanukkah is typically used in reference to the holiday that originated c. 165 B.C. during the time of the Maccabees. At that time, the temple was dedicated by resuming sacrifices on a new altar.

All covenants are inaugurated or dedicated or put into effect the same way—through sacrifice representing the binding party or parties of the agreement. So this has great implications for the New Covenant. There had to be a death for it to begin. And that points to Yeshua alone. This is a significant point that many people either ignore or have never considered.

vv. 19-22 – We are given a description of the inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant that took place right after Moses received the Torah, as recorded in Exodus 24:1-8. In that account, Moses served in a priestly capacity in which he sprinkled the things associated with that covenant—the Torah scroll and the people. And then we are reminded how the tabernacle structure and the vessels it contained were all likewise sprinkled with blood.

The reason, as verse 22 shows, “without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” Why is that so? Why does blood have to be shed in order for forgiveness to occur? Ezekiel 18:20 and Romans 5:17 both make it clear that every sin is grounds for death. Eating forbidden fruit would not be considered a capital offense in modern culture. But it was for Adam and Eve. And so it is for anything we do that misses the mark of God’s standards. But the biblical concept of forgiveness of sin, in which transgressors are no longer held accountable, still requires that the penalty of death is paid. That price, however, can be paid by a substitute. That was what the Levitical system was all about. But it was imperfect, as we have seen. Yeshua, on the other hand, is the perfect substitute, thus giving us perfect forgiveness.

The point is that the shedding of blood is still necessary because the capital penalty has never been annulled. This has great implications for people today who have not

received forgiveness of sin through faith in Yeshua, but seek forgiveness in other religious ways.

It is also important to recognize that the Mosaic Covenant is different than the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant in terms of obligations. God's Covenant with Abraham and his descendants is based unilaterally on God's promises. In the same way, the New Covenant is all about what God promised to do. The Mosaic Covenant, on the other hand, is a bilateral agreement. Both people and God had obligations. In Exodus 24:3, we are told:

“Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’”

In turn, according to Deuteronomy 28-30, God obligated Himself to bless the people for obedience. But if they disobeyed, thus breaking the obligations of the people, He promised to administer judgment.

vv. 23-26 – The chapter resumes comparing the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries. Because every element of the earthly sanctuary became defiled by contact with sinful human beings, each one had to be ritually cleansed by the sprinkling of sacrificial blood of animals. That is brought out in Leviticus 16 regarding Yom Kippur. But cleansing the heavenly sanctuary, as the original and the dwelling place of God, required “better sacrifices” than what took place on earth. In this context, a better sacrifice is described as:

- One that is voluntary, innocent and based on love, which can only be done by a perfect person, thus making Him divine. Verse 24 affirms that point because Yeshua was able to enter without problem into the holy place where the divine presence is.
- One that never has to be repeated (v. 25).
- One that puts away sin (a permanent banishment) instead of just covering it (v. 26).

We can ask the question—did Yeshua cleanse the entire heavenly tabernacle, and in particular the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, by sprinkling His own blood? We can note the following:

- The text never directly states that He did that.
- Likewise, nowhere does it say that Yeshua carried His shed blood into the heavenly holy of holies in the same way that a Levitical high priest did on earth. Verse 12 states that He entered “through” (NASB) or “by” (KJV) or “by means of” (NIV). The Greek preposition *dia* can mean all of those terms. It has to do with the channel of an act or the reason why something happens. If the author had wanted to convey the accompaniment of the blood, he would have used either the preposition *sun* or *meta*. So the fact that Yeshua's blood was shed is the reason He could enter the holy of holies. That is all that verse is saying.
- Nowhere in Scripture does it say that His blood was collected or preserved in any way.
- In the list of the elements of the tabernacle in verses 2-5 the altar and the laver outside the sanctuary are not mentioned by the writer to Hebrews. They, too, were

part of the heavenly original elements that Moses had to copy (Ex 27:1-8; 30:18). Yeshua was never sacrificed on that kind of altar; it was on a cross. And as a high priest, He never had to wash His hands because they were never defiled. So you can see how the earthly pattern varies in some ways from the heavenly one. And that allows for the possibility that Yeshua never actually sprinkled His blood on the mercy seat. His mere presence made possible through His shed blood having put an end to sin could be sufficient in bringing about ceremonial cleansing in the heavenly holy of holies. So, in that way, His cleansing work was applied by virtue of the basis of His shed blood, rather than an actual sprinkling of His blood.

Ultimately, in light of the lack of a direct statement one way or another, we cannot be dogmatic with our answer.

- vv. 27-28 – In keeping with the author’s concern for his audience not to go back to Levitical Judaism, he concludes with an exhortation to look forward to the future day when Yeshua returns bringing the totality of our salvation.