

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Without any doubt, the old covenant tabernacle and its furniture, coupled with the continual ministry of the priests, all served to reveal important spiritual truths. But the most significant truths they revealed, namely, concerning the ministry of Christ, have been missed by most Jews.

The author of Hebrews points out that priests were continually serving in the outer tabernacle, but into the inner tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, only the high priest entered once a year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, which represented the throne of God. Obviously, all that was done in the tabernacle under the regulations of divine worship did nothing to make it possible for the average person to enter the Holy of Holies. Even after the high priest performed the annual rituals of the Day of Atonement, it still was not permissible or even possible for anyone to enter the Holy of Holies, including the high priest himself, unless he came one year later, and under the required great precautions.

So what occurred continually for hundreds of years, first in the tabernacle and later in the temple, only foreshadowed what Jesus, our high priest, would one day accomplish. He would enter heaven before God's actual throne, presenting His own blood as testimony to His suffering and death for the sins of the world, "having obtained eternal redemption" (9:12). Surely if the presenting of the blood of animals in an earthly tabernacle provided some cleansing benefit to worshippers, the blood of the sinless Son of God presented before God's throne provides a much greater benefit. The author writes that it cleansed our consciences "from dead works to serve the living God" (9:14), another reference to the inward work of the Holy Spirit that results in sincere holiness stemming from a changed nature.

Remember that when Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" the veil in the temple was ripped in half (Matt. 27:51). We now have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, as we'll read in the next chapter (10:19). If we could be transported back to Moses' time, we could walk into the Holy of Holies without fear!

Doubtless, many Jews objected to the concept of a Messiah who was crucified. But the author points out that ancient covenants were often agreements made between two parties that had bearing only upon their descendants after they died. Some ancient covenants that included immediate benefits for covenanting parties were ratified by the death of an animal, perhaps symbolic of the deaths of both parties, and indicative of the finality and unchangeableness of the covenant's conditions. This was what occurred at the inauguration of the old covenant. Thus the new covenant is revealed as superior again, because it was ratified, not by the symbolic death of an animal, but by the actual death of one of the covenanting parties, amazingly, God Himself.

Moreover, God has clearly and repeatedly demonstrated under the old covenant that "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22). The old covenant was inaugurated with blood, and so it makes perfect sense that the new covenant would follow suit, and this also explains why Christ had to die.

Take note that the author believed that Christ did not just die for sins committed after His death, but also for sins committed under the old covenant (9:15). The fact is, no one in the history of humanity has had his sins forgiven apart from Christ's death. Just as His death 2,000 years ago paid for sins that had not yet been committed, so it paid for sins committed by people who died long before Jesus lived, whether they realized it or not. Salvation has always been by grace through faith, made possible by Jesus' future or past sacrifice.

Christ's superior sacrifice of Himself was necessary only once (9:25-28). Under the old covenant, when the high priest exited the Holy of Holies to appear before the people, they knew it was just another year before they would witness another atonement. But when Jesus appears again, He'll be coming "without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (9:28). Praise God!