

Study 10: The Great Sacrifice

The Hebrew writer has made some very strong allusions in the previous chapter on the implications of a new High Priest, and what that would naturally mean to the Jewish readers. He now drives home the points that he has been alluding to.

He now follows through on the implications of the New Priesthood, that there must also be a New Covenant. This is one of the two key themes running through Hebrews: That Jesus is the promised Messiah, and that there has been a change of Covenant.

What were the sacrifices and ordinances under the Old Covenant?

Why was it only the High Priest that went into the Holy of Holies?

If the blood of bulls and goats could not remove sin, then how did the Jews receive salvation?, and Why did they make the sacrifices?

What are the implications of the “Testament” that the writer discusses in vss 16-18?

Why a blood sacrifice?

How does Jesus’ return show His perfection?

Homework:

Read the notes, as a review of the study.

- What are the applications for us?
- The Jews had the High Priest enter the Holy of Holies. Where does Jesus enter for us?
- How does this place us with God?

Read Chapter 10 in preparation for next week.

Study Notes for: Study 10: The Great Sacrifice

The Covenant under Moses cannot properly be considered without a consideration of the sacrifices. If there has been a change of Covenant, then what about the sacrifices? Are they to continue, or have they been changed too?

The Hebrew writer now begins a deep discussion on the nature of sacrifice, and specifically on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. He has already alluded to the issues in previous chapters, and like most of the other points he has been bringing along the way, he now drives home the points that he has been alluding to.

What were the sacrifices and ordinances under the Old Covenant?

The writer first describes the layout of the Tabernacle / Temple – specifically the Holy Place of the Temple. The Jews were familiar with the outer parts of the Temple, as they would visit there regularly. But only the Priests would go into the Holy Place. And only the High Priest would go into the Holiest of Holies.

Within the first part of the Tabernacle:

- The Lampstand
- The Table – which had the Showbread

Within the second part:

- The Golden Altar of Incense
- The Ark of the Covenant – containing
 - The Golden Pot of Manna
 - Aaron's rod that budded
 - The tables of the Covenant
- On top of the Ark:
 - The mercy seat
 - The Cherubim

Within the bounds of the Tabernacle / Temple we have a constant reminder to the Jews of the primary elements of the Old Covenant – the very tables given to Moses – the very rod belonging to Aaron – the very ark of the Covenant – and very real Manna that kept the fathers alive in the wilderness.

But even the daily, weekly, and yearly sacrifices would consistently remind the Jews of their heritage with God, and how He had delivered the people from Egypt.

Today, when people everywhere question even the very existence of God, and believe that religion is just “myth”, our Jewish heritage, and even the very existence of the Jews and the remnants of the Temple in Jerusalem serve to remind us that these things **were very real!**

Why was it only the High Priest that went into the Holy of Holies?

We need to remember that the Old Testament was a *foreshadow* of the New. God foresaw the sacrifice of Jesus, and instituted the Old Law so that mankind would understand the significance of Christ and His sacrifice (more on this in chapter 10).

The reason that the High Priest went *alone*, was that he was the *lone* mediator between God and man. The Holy of Holies was the place where the Shekinah presence of God dwelt. The High Priest would go to make intercession with God on behalf of the sins of the people. Only the High Priest could do this, and he was the only one that was given the right to enter.

As our High Priest, Jesus not only fulfils this role, but accomplishes it in a much greater way than was done by the Levitical Priests, and yet there are extremely strong parallels as Jesus “mirrors” the characteristics of the High Priest. Actually it is the other way around, because God designed the Levitical Priesthood to be the image of Jesus’ permanent priesthood.

Notice the characteristics of the High Priest (regarding sacrifice), and the comparison to the sacrifice of Jesus:

High Priest	Jesus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He went alone• Into the Holy of Holies• It was a repeated journey• It required a blood sacrifice• Blood of bulls and goats• He needed to cleanse his own sins first,• Then a sacrifice for the people• Sacrifice offered by High Priest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jesus suffered alone• Into Heaven itself• It was a “once only” journey• Gave his own blood• Perfect lamb of God• No sins of His own to purge • Sacrifice for all people of all time• Jesus offered Himself as sacrifice

If the blood of bulls and goats could not remove sin, then how did the Jews receive salvation?, and Why did they make the sacrifices?

The sacrifices under the law did not *actually* remove sins, but they did in *effect*. Year by year the sacrifices were made, for the sins of the past year, and for all of those before that. The next year they would be offered again, for the sins of the last year, and for all of those before that (including the ones of the year before). Year by year the sins would be

“moved forward” through the sacrifice at the Day of Atonement. Eventually, the sacrifice of Jesus came and took away “all sins” – the past sins of the Jews, as well as the future sins that you and I have committed.

This is somewhat like our baptism into Christ, in that it is not baptism *per se*, that accomplishes anything, but rather it is the answer of our good conscience towards God in the form of obedience (I Pet 3:21). It is not the waters of baptism that washes away our sins, but the blood of Jesus Christ. But the question is ***when*** does the blood of Jesus wash away our sins? The answer is plainly, when we are “buried with Him in baptism” (Rom 6:3-4, Gal 3:27). Clearly, we are saved in *effect* when we are baptised into Christ, but in *actuality* it is through the shedding of Jesus’ blood 2000 years ago that salvation occurred.

In exactly the same way, the Jews were saved in *effect* through the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats, but in *actuality* they were not saved until the shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross.

We can see the effect of the required perpetual sacrifice under the Law, that it was not perfect and could not accomplish the taking away of sins. But under the new law, we do not need to be baptised every year to re-apply the blood of Christ to our lives and have the sins of the past year forgiven! Such is another demonstration of how perfect and complete the New Covenant is compared to the Old, and how perfect and complete is the sacrifice of Jesus our High Priest, mediator, and perfect lamb of God.

What are the implications of the “Testament” that the writer discusses in vss 16-18?

The testament that he is making comparisons with is a man’s “*Last Will and Testament*”, which we just call a “*Will*” today. Before a man dies, he will write down in his Will, what he wants to happen with his estate after he dies. Before he dies, he is fully at liberty to make any changes that he likes to his Will, and many people do just that. Before his death, the Will is of absolutely no effect – it is just a piece of paper that can be changed on a whim. But after the man dies, the things that are written and revealed in the Will are locked in, and cannot be changed, added to, or taken away from. They become “the law” by which the estate is distributed.

Now the implications for Jesus’ law, is that when He was alive He revealed His will through the gospels, and to the apostles. There are some today who teach that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John before the cross are part of the Old Testament, and that Jesus teaching in these books was abolished at the cross. But we can see from the point that is being made by the Hebrew writer here, that this is not the case. We have written for us, the revelation of God through Jesus. He frequently referred to “*It has been said*” (the Old Law), and “*But I say unto you...*” (revealing the New Law). But the New Law did not come into effect until after Jesus died. Once He did die, then the New Will and Testament came into force, and the Old Will and Testament of God was abolished.

To the Jews, the implications are plain – that the Old Law of God under Moses has now been done away with, and has been replaced by the New Law of God revealed by Jesus, and taught to us by His apostles and prophets (2 Pet 3:2).

Why a blood sacrifice?

One of the great questions of all time! And one for which there is no real scriptural answer. Some people have hypothesised that it is because blood represents life, but this really begs the question as to why it was that God required not just a death penalty for sin, but one that was to be accomplished by the shedding of blood? The best answer is that “We will understand it one day, when we have perfect knowledge”. Regardless of *why*, the fact is that that is what God requires. And He foresaw that the perfect sacrifice of Jesus would be accomplished by the shedding of His blood, and consequently required blood sacrifices under the Old Testament Law.

The sanctification of the Old Covenant was accomplished with blood (vs 20), and likewise the sanctification of the New Testament was accomplished with the blood of Jesus.

Blood is so intertwined throughout the Old Testament sacrifices, that it can be said (“*almost said*” NASB) that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood.

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, the two elements that He took were to remind us of His body, and His blood. God wants us to continually remember the blood sacrifice that was made by Jesus – not only in that we are washed clean of our sins by Jesus’ blood when we are baptised into Christ – but that we remember the sacrifice every week!

How does Jesus’ return show His perfection?

Jesus’ sacrifice was not a continual and repetitive sacrifice like those under the Old Covenant, but He was “*once offered*”. This does not mean that it happened “*once upon a time*”, but that it happened only *once* – not repeatedly like the Old sacrifices.

But Jesus is coming back again. The Jew could well ask “does this mean that He will come to offer sacrifices for sin again when He comes?”. The answer to that is plainly and emphatically ***NO!***

When He comes again, it will not have anything to do with making sacrifices for sins – since has already fully accomplished that already. The Second Coming will be to complete the work of God and bring salvation to those who are eagerly awaiting His return.

How about you? Are you eagerly awaiting His return? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb? Take heed of the writer in vs 27 “*It is appointed unto man to die once, and after this comes judgement*”, and prepare yourself to stand before the judgement seat of God (Rom 14:10).