Studies In The Epistle To The Hebrews

LESSON XI

CHRIST OFFERED A BETTER SACRIFICE
THAN THAT OF AARON

Hebrews 9:13—10:18

“Without shedding of blood is no remission,” (Heb. 9:22.)

In the Scripture before us today, Hebrews 9:13—10:18, we find the conclusion of the main argument, the very heart of the epistle and it has to do with the precious blood of Christ. As chapter seven presents the climax concerning the discussion of the sinless Person of our Lord, so our lesson today presents the climax concerning the discussion of His perfect ministry in redeeming our souls. And in both His Person and His work He is far superior to Aaron, the very best high priest that Judaism could offer.

From the very beginning of the epistle the Holy Spirit has been leading up to the message concerning the cross of Christ; for it is the heart of the Gospel. From the beginning the central theme of the book has been clearly stated: “Christianity Is Better Than Judaism as Seen in Its Founder, Christ.” Because the priesthood is the heart of both Judaism and Christianity, the theme was narrowed down to the contrast between Aaron, Judaism’s greatest high priest, and our Lord’s Great High Priestly Person and work. As we saw in our last lesson, the Holy Spirit passed over many of the ceremonial duties of the priest in Israel to emphasize the fact that Christ’s ministry is far “better than” that of Aaron on the Day of Atonement, the most important day in the year to the spiritual life of the nation; therefore, Christ’s ministry is far “better than” that of Aaron on every other day of lesser importance. Our study for today continues that contrast between Aaron’s work on the Day of Atonement and the finished work of Christ. And because the sacrifice offered on that sacred day was the very heart of [1]
the day's service, our Lord's perfect sacrifice is singled out in contrast to the typical offerings on Jewish altars by Israel's great high priest on the Day of Atonement. Thus the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is the very heart of the "chief point" of this profound and wonderful book.

We might give our lesson today such a title as this: "Christ's Perfect Sacrifice 'Once for All' Is 'Better Than' Aaron's Many Animal Sacrifices." Or we might express it in this way: "The Blood of Christ Is 'Better Than' That of the Levitical Sacrifices." However we may state it, we must make the cross central; God makes it central in His inspired Word. In the ninth chapter of Hebrews alone we read the word "blood" twelve times; in chapter ten, three times besides numerous other references to the cross of our Lord.

Chapter seven, we said, presents the climax of the argument concerning His sinless, eternal, unchangeable Person, superior to that of any earthly priest. But beautiful as His life was on earth; "altogether lovely" though it ever was and ever will be from all the past eternity throughout all the future eternity; yet the life of Christ could not save the sinner. He had to die; He planned to die; He came to die on the shameful cross! That is why God said to His ancient people in the days of Moses and Aaron,

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11).

That is why we read in our lesson for today some dozen and more references to the "blood" of atonement, summarized in Heb. 9:22,

"Without shedding of blood is no remission."

Little wonder Satan hates the message of the cross of our Lord Jesus! Little wonder he has filled hundreds of pulpits in our land today with "wolves in sheep's clothing," men who deny or ridicule or blaspheme the very heart of the Gospel - the precious blood of Christ. Little wonder he has sent literally thousands of false teachers of godless cults out into the world to deny the efficacy of the shed blood of Calvary's Cross. But, my friend, it is the cross and that alone which can save the sinner's soul.

The Hebrews living in the days of Christ's earthly ministry and in the days of Paul did not want a suffering Messiah; they wanted a glorious King. They knew not their own dire need of a Saviour. They knew not their Old Testament prophecies concerning the "Man of Sorrows," who had to suffer before He comes to reign. When the Holy Spirit used Paul to write the Epistle to the Hebrews, the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. Christian Jews were being bitterly persecuted; and those intellectually convinced of the claims of Christ, yet not born again, were in danger of turning back to the temple worship. That is why Paul drove home the heart of the matter: To believe in the shed blood of Israel's Great High Priest is to be saved; to deny it, to refuse to trust in it, is to be forever lost. Moreover, all the Levitical offerings upon Jewish altars were but foreshadowings of the one offering "once for all" upon the altar which is Calvary's Cross.

THE LEVITICAL SACRIFICES CLEANSED THE FLESH
THE BLOOD OF CHRIST CLEANSES THE CONSCIENCE
Heb. 9:13-15

Having proved that our "better" Priest ministers in a "better" tabernacle under a "better" covenant, established upon "better" promises, the Holy Spirit centered the argument upon His "better" sacrifice than that of Aaron by saying, in Heb. 9:12,

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

This striking, convincing contrast we read in our last lesson. We saw that only on the Day of Atonement was the blood of the goat shed; whereas the blood of calves was shed not only on that sacred day, but on other days of the year as well. But in the passage before us the high priest's ministry on the Day of Atonement is still before us. The Holy Spirit continues the contrast, proving first that, whereas the Levitical sacrifices could cleanse only the flesh, in a ceremonial
cleansing, the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience from the stain of sin. Let us read 9:13-15 from the Revised Version:

“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanliness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

The margin tells us that the Greek word for “covenant” used twice in verse 15 signifies both “covenant” and “testament.” We shall have more to say concerning this later.

In these verses we have both the daily ceremonial cleansing of the Levitical offerings and the cleansing once a year on the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement the bullock was sacrificed for the sins of the priest and his house; the goat, for the sins of the people; and the blood of both was sprinkled on and before the mercy seat. (See Lev. 16:6, 11, 14, 15.) But “the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled” refer to the daily cleansing from defilement.

We find the ritual concerning the “red heifer” described in the nineteenth chapter of Numbers. Let us turn to it, and read it through carefully. There we note that a “red heifer without spot” was to be slain without the camp of Israel, the body burned to ashes, the blood sprinkled before the tabernacle, and the ashes “kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.” Then we read further that, if a man touched a dead body, being defiled thereby, he was to purify himself with this “water of separation” on the third day and on the seventh day. Thus the defiled Israelite was ceremonially cleansed, in order that he might worship God. The heifer burned to “ashes” speaks to us of the finished work of Christ, His life’s blood poured out—that precious blood is efficacious to cleanse the conscience from the daily defilement of sin, pictured by the touching of a leper or of a dead body. Whereas the blood of the bullock and of the goat foreshadowed the atonement for the guilt and penalty of sin by the blood of Christ, for “it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul;” “the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean,” pictured the “washing of water by the word,” applied to the heart by the Living Water of the Holy Spirit to cleanse the conscience from the defilement of sin in our pilgrim walk. (See Eph., 5:26; John 7:37-39.) We who were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) have been cleansed from the guilt of sin by the shed blood of Christ; our standing before God is, therefore, perfect. But we are defiled daily by sins of the flesh; and only through the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit of God—the “water of separation,” as it were—can we hold communion with the Lord.

Now the forcefulness of the contrast is seen in verse 14. If the blood of “goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer” can cleanse the flesh—in ceremonial cleansing—“how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” The animal sacrifices had to be physically “without blemish” because they typified the morally perfect Son of God. Their blood had to be shed because it foreshadowed the shedding of the precious blood of Christ. But the ceremonial cleansing could never accomplish cleansing of conscience, as does the blood of the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“Through the eternal Spirit” our Lord “offered himself without spot to God.” By the Holy Spirit He was born of the virgin; by the eternal Holy Spirit He was baptized; in the power of the Holy Spirit He lived a sinless life and wrought mighty works, teaching the eternal truths of the God of love. By the eternal Holy Spirit He offered Himself to the Father; and by the Holy Spirit He was raised from the dead. Thus the Triune God planned our salvation, wrought it for us, and enables us to be cleansed in our conscience “from dead works to serve the living God.”
Yes; we have been saved to serve our Lord. How else shall never-dying souls know of His redemption? He has “no other plan” for sending the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We could not serve Him when we were “dead in trespasses and sins.” Our “dead works” of benevolence and philanthropy and human-kindness were “dead works” still. Only by faith in the blood of our Sacrifice can we be cleansed from the guilt of sin and from the daily defilement of sin, “to serve the living God.”

Verse 15 links the offering of Christ with “the new covenant” which He sealed with His blood, forever setting aside “the old covenant” of the Law of Moses. “And for this cause”; that is, because of His shed blood, He is the Mediator of “a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Here the Holy Spirit refers again to the fact that all the Old Testament saints, “under the first covenant,” were saved “on a credit,” as it were, by faith in the Saviour to come. The “promise” of “the eternal inheritance” was fulfilled in their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A few moments ago we said that the Greek word for “covenant” here also means “testament.” And the verses which follow continue this two-fold reference to the word. Now a “last will and testament” is effective only when “a death” has “taken place.” And in this sense our Lord had to die, in order that sinners, believing in His shed blood as an atonement for the soul, might see the realization of “the promise of the eternal inheritance.” And had you ever thought, my friend, of the names we apply to the Word of God? We divide it into “The Old Testament” and “The New Testament!” The Old Covenant or Old Testament foretold the coming of the Testator, whose death was to make valid, fulfill, usher in The New Covenant or New Testament! And all this was accomplished by His vicarious death on Calvary! God has done everything to show us how central the cross of Jesus is in all His Word, in all His plan of redemption for lost sinners!

In this paragraph from the ninth chapter of Hebrews we have read of three eternal verities: “Eternal redemption,” verse 12; “the eternal Spirit,” verse 14; and our “eternal inheritance,” verse 15. Again, we are reassured of the eternal security of our souls, once we have let the Lord Jesus Christ cleanse our conscience by the blood of the new covenant. It is an insult to God to doubt His Word. It is unbelief to doubt it. It honors Him to believe it. Our redemption is not an annual thing, as we saw in our last lesson; it is not for a year or a day or a thousand centuries. It is “eternal.” God said so in countless ways, throughout His inspired Word inspired by His “eternal Spirit.” That is why our inheritance is “eternal.” Peter tells us that it is “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven” for God’s blood-bought children (1 Peter 1:4). What more reassuring promise could we ask?

“THE OLD TESTAMENT” (OR “COVENANT”) WAS SEALED WITH THE BLOOD OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES—THE NEW, BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Heb. 9:16-23

Continuing the discussion concerning the “inheritance,” which falls to the heir when a death has “taken place,” the Holy Spirit contrasts yet further the “old testament,” or “covenant,” with the new. Both the “covenant” and the “testament” still seem to be presented here. Let us read this contrast, as recorded in Heb. 9:16-23:

“For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. For a testament is of force where there hath been death: for it doth never avail while he that made it liveth” (verses 16, 17).

In other words, if a father makes his will, leaving his earthly property to his son, that son does not actually inherit the property until the father dies. The analogy is clear: God promised an “eternal inheritance,” to become effective upon the death of Christ. The Old Testament saints believed God’s promise; but a full atonement was not made, making
valid the promises, until the death of the Heavenly Testator.
The cross is central in God's plan of salvation!

"Wherefore even the first covenant hath not been dedicated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses unto all the people according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant (or 'testament') which God commanded to you ward. Moreover the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry he sprinkled in like manner with the blood. And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.

"It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Heb. 9:18-23).

The sprinkling of the blood under the old covenant was a witness to the fact that disobedience of God's law demanded death; and by faith in the death of the Messiah who was promised the sinner in Israel was saved. Hyssop was the plant, with which the blood was applied to the lintel and door posts in Egypt, on the night of the first passover. And in Hebrews we read that Moses sprinkled with blood the Book of the Law, the people, the tabernacle, and all the sacred vessels therein. "The Book of the Law," as also all of God's Word is "sprinkled" with the blood of Christ—again we are reminded of the often-repeated truth in this lesson today, that the cross is central! Moses and the priests sprinkled the people and the tabernacle with blood, teaching Israel day by day, century after century, that "without shedding of blood is no remission."

That statement in verse 22 looks back to the old covenant, and it looks forward to the new. There is no other way of salvation, other than by the blood of Christ Jesus, the Lord.

Verse 23 not only continues the contrast between the sacrifices of Judaism and the offering of the blood of Christ, but it also mentions one of the great mysteries of the Bible—why "the heavenly things" should need cleansing. We can well understand the first part of the verse; for we have been reading in this epistle the interpretation of God's instruction to Moses concerning the Jewish tabernacle, which was a "pattern" or "copy" of "the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." We can well understand why that earthly sanctuary needed to be "cleaned," because sinful men worshipped there and ministered there. But why should the "heavenly things," the "true tabernacle" with its furnishings, need cleansing?

To repeat, this is one of the great mysteries of the Bible, revealing in some measure the extent to which sin had penetrated when Lucifer fell from heaven through pride and became Satan. Our Lord said on one occasion, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Thus "sin began in the heavens, and the heavens became unclean." That enemy of God and man left the marks of sin right down to this earth. Somehow, in the providence of God, Satan had access into His presence to accuse Job. He is still "the accuser of our brethren," and accuses believers in Christ "day and night" (Rev. 12:10). It will not always be so, as this text in Revelation plainly states. But that is why we need our Great High Priest now to be our " Advocate with the Father" (I John 2:1). That is why He ever lives at the throne of grace to intercede for us.

Satan's sin seems to have affected even heaven itself in some way. But in "the new heaven and the new earth," "righteousness" shall dwell (II Peter 3:13). And into that "new heaven," purified of every trace of Satan,

"... there shall in no wise enter... any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:1, 27).

The necessity for cleansing of "the heavenly things... with better sacrifices" than those of the Levitical offerings suggests to us also the great extent of the atoning work of Christ. How far reaching it is in time and space and in the hearts of men! There are no "better sacrifices" than that of the Lord Jesus. None other is needed!
THE THREE APPEARANCES OF CHRIST
AS OUR SACRIFICE, OUR ADVOCATE, OUR KING-PRIEST
"Better Than" the Shadows Which Typed Them
Heb. 9:24-28

In the light of all that the Holy Spirit has been explaining to us about the typical significance of the ministry of Aaron on the Day of Atonement, the conclusion drawn in Heb. 9:24-28 is wonderful. It sets forth the three “appearings” of our Lord—as our perfect Sacrifice on the cross, as our Advocate and Intercessor now before the throne of grace, and as our coming King-Priest “after the order of Melchizedek”—so far superior to Aaron and all his sons that the contrast speaks for itself:

1. “... now once in the end (or ‘consummation’) of the ages hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (verse 26).
2. “Christ is . . . entered . . . into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (verse 24).
3. “... and unto them that look for him shall appear the second time apart from sin unto salvation” (verse 28).

These three “appearings” of Christ summarize the Gospel message! But let us go back to read carefully the entire passage from which we have quoted these reassuring words:

“For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own; else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end (or ‘consummation’) of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation.”

Our risen and ascended Lord entered not into the earthly tabernacle with its Holy of Holies, but “into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us.” Because of His eternal deity, and because of His sinless humanity, He had the right, as the God-Man, to enter heaven itself on His own account; but He could not enter there as our Representative without the shedding of His own blood. Aaron dared not enter the earthly Holy of Holies without blood—for himself and as the representative of his sinful people. Our Lord had no sin in Himself, but as our Mediator, He had to enter heaven on the basis of His atoning sacrifice.

And there He has been ministering for nearly two thousand years, interceding for His own. His sacrificial work is finished; His intercessory work continues and will continue as long as His redeemed are on earth; therefore, in need of an Advocate to “appear before the face of God” for them. Again, let me remind you, my Christian friend, that the seventeenth chapter of John gives us a glimpse of the kind of prayer our Great High Priest is praying for His own. Let us never forget to thank Him that He is praying for our daily cleansing from sin through the Word of God, for our safe-keeping from the evil one, for our Christian love one for another, for our testimony before the godless world, and for our eternal abode with Him, to behold and to share His glory. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us!”

In verses 25 and 26 of our text we see yet another of the many contrasts in this epistle between the “year by year” ministry of Aaron in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and the “once for all” entrance of Jesus, our Great High Priest, into “the holiest of all.” What if, as the text suggests, our sinless Saviour had needed to suffer “often...since the foundation of the world”! The very suggestion is unthinkable! No human being can enter fully into His agony in Gethsemane and on Calvary, as His holy soul shrank from becoming our Sin-Bearer. What if that terrible agony had to be repeated even once, much less “often”! But the strength of the argument here lies in the fact that “once for all” was enough, because the sinless Sacrifice was the
eternal Lord, as well as perfect Man; therefore, a worthy, spotless Substitute for sinners. For some four thousand years, from Adam to Christ, sinful man had been given every opportunity to obey God; he had been tested in various ways; but always man had failed because he was a hopeless, helpless sinner; that is, hopeless and helpless in himself, utterly dependent upon the grace of God for salvation. Then "at the consummation of the ages" Christ was manifested "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." In so doing He fully obeyed His law, vindicated it, and magnified it, being both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The sin question was forever settled, forever "put away" for all who will believe in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

For the meaning of verses 27 and 28, we need to observe the force of the words, "as... so." "Inasmuch as" sinful man must die; and following death, be judged; even "so" Christ took upon Himself the sinner's guilt, bearing it away in His death. He bore the judgment for the guilty ones who will but accept His free gift of grace. In the Garden of Eden God had told Adam that, in the day he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he should "surely die." He did eat the forbidden fruit; he did disobey God; therefore, he died. And "death reigned from Adam to Moses." (Rom. 5:14). "Death reigns" even now for all who will not believe in Him who died, in order that "the gift of righteousness" might "reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17).

Oh, that unregenerated men would believe that after death "cometh judgment." The world today does not hear much preaching on eternal hell. Men do not like to hear it, and Satan blinds their eyes to the need of redemption from eternal torment, eternal separation from God. But the Lord Jesus taught it, even as did the prophets of Old Testament times. The apostles taught it; the greatest evangelists the world has ever known taught it. We must believe it if we accept the Bible as God's inspired Word. But "thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" of the One who bore the judgment for us in His death, that we might live in Him! (See II Cor. 9:15.)

But let us look further at verse 28 of our chapter. Just as sin brought forth death; just as surely as death is followed by judgment for all who will not accept Christ as the only Sin-Bearer; just as surely will He who died for our sins and arose for our justification appear a second time "apart from sin... unto salvation," to deliver His redeemed from the very presence and power of sin. The first time He came to earth, our Lord "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." When He comes again, He will appear "apart from sin"; that is, not to "put away sin." He did that "once for all." He will come, not as the Sin-Bearer, but "unto salvation" in its complete and fullest sense—salvation of body, as well as of soul and spirit. Our souls are already saved if we love Him; but our bodies are still in humiliation and weakness and frailty. Our loved ones who died trusting in Him are "with Christ" in their spirits; but their bodies are going back to dust, in weakness and in corruption. When Jesus comes again, their bodies will be raised in glory, in immortality, in incorruption, and reunited to their spirits, forever to be with the Lord. If we live until He comes, our bodies of humiliation shall be changed, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," and "fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21; cf. I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:51-57).

But if we are to share and behold our Lord's glory throughout all eternity, we must believe that He died to "put away" forever all our sins. Only to "them that look for him," or "wait for him," will He "appear a second time... unto salvation." Now let us bear in mind that these words do not teach a partial rapture of the church, as some hold. In other words, there are those who teach that some believers will go through the great tribulation, while others are translated to be with Christ at His coming to take them before the tribulation period begins. There is absolutely nothing in the Scriptures to teach a partial translation or rapture of the church. All members of the bride of Christ shall be "caught up together"—the dead in Christ raised first; the living changed—"together" to meet the Lord in the air. (See I Thess. 4:13-18.)
He hath appeared; He now appears; He shall appear—our Sacrifice, our Advocate, our King-Priest! He died for us; He lives for us; He is coming again for us! That is the Gospel message in a few words. And when He comes in glory, it will be as the King-Priest, "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," not after the order of a sinning, dying priesthood, as was Aaron's. As King of Righteousness and King of Peace, He will come to rule over a cleansed and purified earth.

To the sorely tried and persecuted Hebrew Christians of his day Paul seems to have been saying: "This is your Messiah and King who is to come, the Hope of Israel, the Mediator of the new covenant, of which Jeremiah wrote. Just as Aaron came forth out of the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, wearing once more his garments of 'glory and beauty,' even so your King-Priest will come in all His uncreated glory, to be honored and worshipped by His own." To the enlightened, but unregenerate, Jews the inspired apostle seems to have been saying: "Put your faith in the one sufficient sacrifice of your Great High Priest. He came to put away your sin once for all; He ever lives to pray for those who will trust His finished atonement; He is coming again to usher in the kingdom, of which the prophets wrote." To Jews and Gentiles today and throughout this church age, to all who will love the Lord Jesus, Paul seems to have been saying, "Israel's Great High Priest is your Substitute, your Advocate, your Bridegroom, your coming King."

When the Lord Jesus returns to rule upon earth, then there will be no more thorns to infest the ground; there will be no more curse; the animal kingdom will be at peace; and the desert will blossom as the rose.

"The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

"He (Christ) shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72:8).

Repeatedly throughout this series of studies we have quoted the words which open chapter ten, for they summarize briefly the purpose of the Law of Moses, as "a shadow of good things to come" in Christ Jesus the Lord. We have seen that the earthly tabernacle was a "shadow" or "pattern" of the true tabernacle in heaven; that Aaron in his ministry was a "shadow" of our Great High Priest, ministering in heaven itself; that the old covenant demanded perfect obedience, which only the One who came to bring in the new covenant by fully keeping the old and by paying the penalty of sin could obey. And now the Holy Spirit emphasizes yet further in the first verses of chapter ten that the Levitical sacrifices were but "shadows" of the one perfect sacrifice of Christ. He shows how imperfect they were by the fact that they had to be repeated "year by year"—still referring to the Day of Atonement; by the fact that they could not cleanse the conscience of sin; by the fact that there was the "remembrance" of sin made each year on the great Day of Atonement. Sin was not then forever "put away." Let us read the first four verses of chapter ten; they speak for themselves:

"For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh. Else would they not have ceased to be offered? because the worshippers, having been once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance made of sins year by year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins."

That last sentence settles the argument. There is nothing to be added to the Holy Spirit's forceful statement of fact. "The blood" of animal sacrifice was only a "shadow" of the precious blood of Christ.
THE PERFECTION AND EFFICACY OF THE SACRIFICE
OF CHRIST, OUR KING-PRIEST

Heb. 10:5-14

Again, the Holy Spirit quotes from the Hebrew Old Testament to convince the Jews, who believed it to be inspired of God, that their own Scriptures foretold His sacrifice on the cross. As we compare the prophecy quoted from the fortieth Psalm with the quotation in the tenth chapter of Hebrews, we observe that the New Testament gives a fuller interpretation of the text than does the prophecy in the Old Testament. After all, that is the privilege of the Holy Spirit, who wrote both Testaments, to give added light, as He knows best. We refer to the different phraseology in Psalm 40:6 and in Heb. 10:5. Let us read both passages:

PSALM 40:6-8

"Sacrifice and offering thou hast no delight in;
Mine ears hast thou opened:
Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required.
Then said I, Lo, I am come;
In the roll of the book it is written of me:
I delight to do thy will, O my God."

HEBREWS 10:5-7

"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith,
Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not,
But a body didst thou prepare for me;
In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure:
Then said I, Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me)
To do thy will, O God."

The added light in the Hebrews quotation, to which we referred a moment ago, has to do with the words of the Psalm, "Mine ears hast thou opened," translated and explained more fully in Hebrews to read, "A body didst thou prepare me." The literal Hebrew of the Psalm reads, "Ears hast thou digged (or 'pierced') for me." Some would interpret this to refer to the Hebrew servant who loved his master, and refused to go out free in the sabbatic, or seventh, year, preferring to have a hole bored through his ear to witness to the fact that he wanted to be the willing servant of his master as long as he lived. (See Deut. 15:1-23.) Those who suggest this interpretation of the text explain that, as the willing Servant of Jehovah, Christ did not save Himself from the cross, but was "pierced" for those He loved and came to redeem.

Another suggested interpretation of "Mine ears hast thou opened" is that the Son was obedient to hear and do the will of His Father in heaven.

Whether or not the Holy Spirit had these thoughts in mind, we do not know. Both are certainly true of our Lord. But still the fact remains that the fuller explanation of the prophecy, as recorded in Hebrews, speaks of the "body" of our Lord Jesus, "prepared" for Him by supernatural power at His coming into the world. And that "body" was "prepared," in order that He might offer it as a perfect sacrifice for sin. That is the thought not to be overlooked in this wonderful passage.

It is the voice of the Son of God, speaking to the Father, long before He was "made flesh and dwelt among us," and saying that our Triune God did not find pleasure in the animal sacrifices and offerings of a rebellious people; that, at best, those animal sacrifices could never take away sins, but were mere types of the promised sacrifice of the Son of God. Therefore, the Father, by the Holy Spirit, "prepared" the body of the sinless Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. Why? So that, as the God-Man, He might live a sinless life and die a vicarious death for sinners.

All four of the Levitical offerings are included in this reference. "Sacrifice" refers to the peace offering. The word "offering" is translated in the margin as "meal offering." And the "burnt offerings" and "sin offering" complete the four. (See Lev. 1-7.) We know that all of the Levitical offerings and sacrifices pointed on to Christ, each presenting some particular phase of His Person and work. And then we hear the holy Son of God saying to His Father in heaven,

". . . Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me) To do thy will, O God."

Christ did fulfill His Father's will in every detail. Of this the whole body of Scripture speaks. In His life on earth
He did the will of Him by whom He was sent, as the Gospel of John repeatedly states. In Gethsemane He prayed, not for His own will, but for the will of His Father. And in His death He fulfilled the will of the Triune God—to redeem sinners.

It is wonderful that all of this was written "in the roll of the book" of the Old Testament concerning the Son of God, long centuries before He was "made flesh" at His incarnation. The Holy Spirit recorded this and many other prophecies concerning Him, in order that we might know that He is the promised one of God—supernaturally foretold, supernaturally born, supernatural in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Let us never lose sight of the miracle of prophecy fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God.

In Heb. 10:8, 9 we read the Holy Spirit's further interpretation of this quotation from the fortieth Psalm:

"Saying above, Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein (the which are offered according to the law), then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

In other words, when Christ came to obey His Father's will and offer Himself "once for all" as a sacrifice for sin, He took away "the first" sacrifices; i.e., the Levitical sacrifices; and established forever "the second" sacrifice of His cross. Therefore, the Levitical sacrifices and offerings have been forever done away, even as the human priesthood, the earthly tabernacle, and the old covenant have "vanished away." They were the things of Judaism, which have been superseded by the things of Christ.

"By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

By the will of God, through the blood of Jesus, we have been "sanctified," "set apart" unto Him. Once more we read here the finality of the transaction made at Calvary—"once for all."

It is Heb. 10:11 that proves to us that the Jewish temple was still standing when this epistle was written, even as we mentioned in the beginning of this series of studies; for here the word "standeth" is in the present, progressive tense. But the chief meaning of the verse is the continued contrast between the work of the everstanding priest of Judaism and the finished work of Christ, in that He "sat down on the right hand of God" after His sacrifice on the cross had been offered "once for all."

We have seen the significance of the absence of a chair in the earthly sanctuary; the priest's work was never finished; he had to stand continually, ministering for his people by offerings which "could never take away sins." But our Great High Priest, having offered one sufficient sacrifice "once for all," "sat down" in the place of all authority and power. And, again, the Holy Spirit quotes Psalm 110:1, already given prominence in this epistle.

Let us read verses 11-14, which continue the proof of the perfection and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, our King-Priest, who is waiting for the appointed day when all His creatures shall bow the knee before Him:

"And every priest indeed standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, the which can never take away sins: but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

Thus we see the will of God linked with our sanctification—not sinless perfection in this life, but separation from a godless world unto Christ in our pilgrim walk all based upon the blood of the Lord Jesus. By His one perfect sacrifice we are redeemed from the penalty of sin; and by His perfect sacrifice we find cleansing from defilement in our Christian walk, even as we "confess our sins" and let Him cleanse us "from all unrighteousness." (See I John 1:9.)
The Witness of the Holy Spirit to "The End of The Law" of Levitical Sacrifices By the Finished Work of Christ on Calvary

Heb. 10:15-18

Referring again to the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the new covenant, but rightly attributing that prophecy to the "Holy Spirit," the inspired record concludes the main argument of the epistle in Heb. 10:15-17:

"And the Holy Spirit also beareth witness to us; for after he hath said,"

This is the covenant that I will make with them
After those days, saith the Lord:
I will put my laws on their heart,
And upon their mind also will I write them; then saith he,
And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Who would dare refute the witness of the Holy Spirit? Only an unbeliever in the Triune God! We considered this quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 in some detail when we studied the eighth chapter of Hebrews, concerning the new covenant. We shall only remind ourselves here of the heart of the matter, that the new covenant, sealed by the precious blood of Christ, has forever done away with the old covenant of the Mosaic Law. And the sacrifices formed the very heart of Judaism. Therefore, the witness of the Holy Spirit is final and irrefutable. God has promised to remember our sins no more forever!

"Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Heb. 10:18).

To continue to go to Jewish altars, while the temple was yet standing; to continue to sacrifice the blood of lambs and calves and goats and turtle doves and young pigeons, was to deny the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. The Hebrew Christian living in the days of Paul was convinced that he must withdraw completely from the ritual of Judaism, and "go on" with Christ. The "enlightened," but unregenerated, Hebrew was without excuse, if he became apostate, turning his back upon Israel's Messiah and the only Saviour and King. The Christian throughout this church age, whether Jew or Gentile, is without excuse if he does not have assurance of eternal security by faith in the finished work of Christ. He is without excuse if he tries to add anything whatsoever, any paltry works of his own, to the perfect and final work of his Lord and Saviour upon Calvary's Cross. This is the heart of the message of this wonderful Epistle to the Hebrews. It is the message of the Holy Spirit of God; and He can not be mistaken!

As we have read this lesson today, recorded in Heb. 9:13—10:18, we must surely have been impressed with the emphasis given to its central truth by the very repetition of fact. God had a purpose in this; He wants this message of the cross to be written indelibly upon our hearts. He wants us to know that the cross is central in all His Word, in all that has to do with our salvation from the penalty, the power, and the presence of sin.

Possibly a brief outline, summarizing the teaching, will help us to realize the forcefulness of this weighty argument, set forth in unmistakable terms by the Holy Spirit of God. As we scan the lines of the sacred pages, not omitting any of the inspired repetition, given for emphasis and clearness, we find a convincing array of contrasts, in this book of striking contrasts between the things of Judaism and the "better" things of Christ:

The Levitical Sacrifices

The "better" sacrifice of Christ

The blood of goats and calves," 9:12.
"The blood of others," 9:23.
"The same sacrifices, which can never take away sins," 10:11.
Flesh and blood.
Physically "without blemish" (cf. Ex. 12:5).

"His own blood," 9:12.
"One sacrifice for sins for ever," 10:12.

“Often . . . every year,” 9:25

“A remembrance again made of sin every year,” 10:3.

“Sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh” (i.e., ceremonial cleansing), 9:13.

The earthly tabernacle was “purified with these,” 9:23.

Failure to cleanse the conscience of sin, 10:2-4.

Can not make the worshipper perfect, 10:1.

“The law . . . a shadow of good things to come,” 10:1.

Written on tables of stone.

The old covenant was sealed with the blood of the animal sacrifice, 9:15-22.

Granted a temporal inheritance.

“Death” is followed by certain judgment for the unsaved, 9:27.

“Every priest standeth,” 10:11.

Many high priests.


Fear of death for the intruder into the Holy of Holies.

“The way into the holiest” closed, 9:8.

“The veil of the temple was rent in twain,” Matt. 27:51.

Stay back!

Taken away; i.e., annulled! 10:9.


“No more offering for sin,” 10:18.

“There’s no more offering for sin,” 10:18.

“Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more,” 10:17.

“How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purge your conscience . . . ?” 9:14.

The heavenly tabernacle was cleansed “with better sacrifices than these,” 9:23.

By obedience to His Father’s will, He is “sanctifieth . . once for all,” 10:5-10.

Can and does make the worshipper perfect, 9:28; 10:1.

“The very image of the things,” 10:1.

Written in “their hearts, and in their minds,” 10:16.

The new covenant was sealed with the blood of Christ, 9:15-23.

Guarantees an “eternal inheritance,” 9:15.

Christ’s sacrifice guarantees deliverance from judgment for the believer at His second coming, 9:28; cf. John 5:24.

Christ “sits down,” 10:12.


“Boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22).

With Heb. 10:18 the main portion of the argument is closed; all that follows is in the nature of conclusions drawn from the truths already presented, together with exhortation, warning, comfort, and encouragement. In our next lesson we shall begin with 10:19; but we would not close this study today without reading the verses which immediately follow the contrast between the Levitical sacrifices and the one, perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22).

“Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience,” is the result of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, applied to our hearts by faith; whereas having “our bodies washed with pure water,” by the “washing of water through the word” in the power of the Holy Spirit, answers to the “water of purification” used by the Israelite of old in the ordinance of the red heifer. In other words, our conscience is cleansed from the penalty of sin by the precious blood of our Saviour; our pilgrim walk with Him in a world of defilement is maintained only by the Word of God as it is written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit of God. There is no other way to walk well-pleasing unto Him, apart from faith in His cross and communion with Him through His Word in the power of His Holy Spirit. May He help us to realize these searching truths in a practical, daily experience, even until He takes us home to heaven! We need not fear to take all our problems to Him in prayer. Indeed, He longs for us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace,” drawing near unto Him by the way of the cross. Then He wants us to go “into all the world,” leading never-dying souls to Him who is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And this is His message for a sinful people:
“Not all the blood of beasts
   On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
   Or wash away the stain.
“But Christ, the heavenly lamb,
   Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
   And richer blood than they.”

“It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).

“Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

“Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (I Peter 1:18-20).

“. . . having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20).

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7).

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world . . the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (John 1:29; Rev. 13:8).