

Sanctuary Language in Hebrews



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 9.

MEMORY TEXT: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building” (Hebrews 9:11).

KEY THOUGHT: Hebrews is full of sanctuary language that helps us understand what the Lord is doing for us in heaven now.

IN DECEMBER 1989, *Moody Monthly* reported: “Two Talmudic schools near the Western (Wailing) Wall are teaching students details of temple service. Other scholars are researching genealogies to identify members of the priestly line. Plans call for an organizing convention of priestly descendants next year. One group of Jewish activists, the Temple Mount Faithful, dedicated a three-ton ‘cornerstone’ two kilometers from the temple site. Police prevented them from staging the ceremony in the Western Wall Plaza.”—Page 74. Long after its destruction, there is still interest in the sanctuary. This week we’ll take a deeper look “within the veil”; that is, the veil of the sanctuary in heaven.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In Hebrews, what role does the earthly sanctuary and ministry play? What can they teach us about what happens in the heavenly sanctuary? What’s the purpose of Christ’s ministry there?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.

Sunday

August 3

THE SANCTUARY ON EARTH (Hebrews 9).

The book of Hebrews is clear: Jesus is our High Priest in heaven. This concept of priesthood, of course, wasn't something that Paul's readers were unfamiliar with. Paul constructs his reasoning around the Old Testament sanctuary and the priesthood that officiated in this sanctuary. Apart from that background, much of what he says about Christ and His ministry in heaven doesn't make sense.

Read Hebrews 9:1-3. What is the author talking about? Why does he bring this topic into the discussion of Christ's high-priestly ministry? See also Exodus 25:8. Read Hebrews 9:4, 5. What else was Paul talking about? Now read verses 6, 7. What is the author describing here?

Paul gives a quick review of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary service, describing both apartments, as well as the daily and yearly rituals that took place in them. Then, in verses 8-14, he talks about Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary and His high-priestly ministry there.

Though Paul's point is the superiority of what Christ is doing in heaven as opposed to what happened on earth (see Heb. 9:11), it is clear that the ministry in the sanctuary below (the earthly) is linked with the ministry in the sanctuary above (the heavenly). That's why Paul talks about them together. The understanding of what happened on earth helps us understand what's happening in heaven.

***H**ebrews uses two words for the sanctuary, **hagion/hagia** and **skene**. The first word is originally an adjective and means "holy." In Hebrews it is used as a noun and is translated "sanctuary," "Holy Place," and "Most Holy Place," depending on the context. The second word is "tent" or "tabernacle" and reminds us of the Old Testament tabernacle in the wilderness.*

How well do you understand the earthly-sanctuary service? Though we don't need to know all the details, considering that the book of Hebrews places such an emphasis on it, is it not worthy of study? Read the sections in Exodus and Leviticus that detail the building, the structure, and the services performed there, remembering that this whole system symbolized Christ's death and heavenly ministry in our behalf.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Hebrews 9:1-3.

Teachers Aims:

1. To illuminate Christ's ministry in heaven through study of the imagery and language of the earthly sanctuary.
2. To show that the book of Hebrews is an overview of the entire plan of salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Importance of the Earthly Sanctuary to the Heavenly.

- A. Understanding what happened in the earthly sanctuary helps us relate to the service of the heavenly sanctuary.
- B. The sacrifices and offerings of the earthly sanctuary were fulfilled with Christ's sacrifice in our place.

II. The Sanctuary Service Represented at the Cross.

- A. The sacrifices of the earthly sanctuary were replaced by Christ on the cross.
- B. Christ accepted our sins so we might approach God as blameless.
- C. Christ took up the role of High Priest and Mediator.

III. The Tragedy of Sin and Its Solution.

- A. Sin caused a rupture between heaven and earth.
- B. Sin also separated the created from the Creator.
- C. Christ's sacrifice became the uniting bridge between God and humanity.

Summary: The services of the sanctuary were a bridge between God and His people. When Christ chose to accept His role as our Savior, He became the living Bridge to reunite God with humanity.

Commentary.

The particular sanctuary that Paul has in mind here in Hebrews, is clearly the wilderness tent described in detail in Exodus. The wilderness tent consisted of the court, the outer compartment, and the inner compartment.

In the tabernacle and in the temple (which later replaced the wilderness structure), the outer compartment, the Holy Place, was in continual use. Day by day, morning and evening, the appointed priests entered to trim the lamps on the lampstand (Exod. 27:20) and, at the same time, to burn incense on the incense altar (Exod. 30:7).

Monday

August 4

THE SANCTUARY IN HEAVEN.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:1, 2).

The apostle, as well as his audience, must have been well-versed in the Old Testament and its ritual services. The sanctuary that he refers to is the original earthly sanctuary as introduced by God and built under the supervision of Moses (Exodus 25–31 and 35–40), as opposed to the later temple erected by Solomon, which was more elaborate than the wilderness model and contained more items of the same kind, such as ten golden lamp stands and ten tables as opposed to one each in the wilderness tabernacle. (See 2 Chronicles 3–7.)

Besides the elements we studied yesterday, what other aspects of the earthly-sanctuary service are depicted in Hebrews 9?

Heb. 9:9 _____

Heb. 9:10 _____

Heb. 9:21 _____

Besides pointing to all the basic furnishings of the sanctuary, it also talks about some of the rituals that were performed there, including various sacrifices and offerings. Though he doesn’t go into detail about the contents of the heavenly sanctuary, one point does seem clear: The author is convinced that a real sanctuary exists in heaven, in which Jesus is ministering in our behalf.

Read Hebrews 8:1, 2. What does the author say that indicates the reality of the heavenly sanctuary?

Paul’s discussion about the earthly sanctuary and its “gifts and sacrifices” (Heb. 9:9) and “meat and drinks, and diverse washings” (vs. 10) was never an end in itself but always a prelude to a discussion about the heavenly. That’s the whole point of Hebrews: to show the readers that there’s something even better than the earthly system that God Himself ordained, and that’s the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus ministers as High Priest.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

In addition, week by week the appointed priests entered the Holy Place to put fresh loaves on the table of shewbread (Lev. 24:5, 6). These were the principal services discharged in the first tabernacle; any number of the priesthood could discharge them.

But none except the high priest was permitted to enter the second tabernacle, the Holy of Holies. The priest was permitted to enter it only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and the conditions of his entering were strictly prescribed. These conditions are set out most fully in Leviticus 16, where the Holy of Holies is called “the holy place within the veil.” Aaron (and each successive high priest of Israel) might enter the Holy of Holies only on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) in each year.

The New Year, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles originally belonged to one festal complex at which the kingship of the God of Israel was annually celebrated.

But in the New Testament antitype of this festal complex, the divine Priest-King fills the central and decisive role by virtue of His perfect self-sacrifice. He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God and reigns forevermore from the heavenly Zion—High Priest of the new and eternal order.

In verses 2-10 of Leviticus 16 we have the description of the Levitical order. In contrast, we have now the description of Christ’s priesthood in verses 11-28. In keeping with the central theme of Hebrews, Christ, our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, is infinitely superior to Aaron and the Levitical order. The apostle Paul is using the Greek word *koine* Greek to say the heavenly tabernacle is better than the one on earth. The apostle Paul follows the Exodus prototype: redemption, covenant, and sanctuary. The sanctuary of the new covenant is superior, because it is heavenly (Heb. 8:1; 9:24). It is clear that here Hebrews relies on Exodus 25:9, 40, finding there a reference to God’s genuine heavenly sanctuary, which antedates the earthly sanctuary.

Inasmuch as the sanctuary is a copy of the original, it is inferior, described as a “shadow” of the heavenly sanctuary. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the heavenly sanctuary is real; Jesus Christ entered there after His ascension (Heb. 4:14-16; 6:19, 20; 9:24; 10:12) and is performing a priestly work in heaven (Heb. 8:1, 2). For Paul, the reality of all these experiences is indisputable. It is clear the book of Hebrews follows the teaching of the Old Testament and assumes a real sanctuary in heaven.

Meanwhile, Aaron and his successors went into the earthly Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement by virtue of animal sacrifices. Jesus Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary “through” (Greek preposition *dia* meaning “through,” “by,” “by means of,” or, more generally, “on account of”) His own blood. Aaron surely carried the sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies. Jesus Christ accomplished in reality what Aaron and his successors performed in type by the twofold act of slaying the victim and presenting its blood in the Holy of Holies.

Tuesday

August 5

SACRIFICES.

Though Hebrews is clear about the reality of Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the topic isn't limited to just that. He talks also about sacrifices. And no wonder. If sacrifice was central to the earthly system, how much more so to the heavenly?

Which animals are mentioned in Hebrews that were used as sacrifices? Heb. 9:12, 13, 19; 10:4.

Which types of sacrifices do they point to? Lev. 1:5; 4:3; 16:3; Num. 7:17.

Four different kinds of animals are enumerated in the four verses of Hebrews. With the exception of the heifer, they come in pairs: "goats and calves" and "goats and bulls." Goats are found most often. Interestingly enough, the lamb, which is so prominent in Revelation (see also John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet. 1:19), is not found in Hebrews.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, mentions goats in Numbers 7:17 in the context of "peace offerings." A synonym for the word *bull* used by Hebrews is found in Leviticus 1:6 as a "burnt offering" and in Leviticus 4:3 as a "sin offering." The heifer, mentioned in Hebrews 9:13, occurs in Numbers 19, in connection with the peace offering. There the ashes of the red heifer are used for purification. Bulls and goats were also used on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

Thus, the different animals used as sacrifices remind us of the basic types of Old Testament sacrifices, including (but certainly not limited to) the Day of Atonement.

Yet, all these animal sacrifices were only preliminary, unsatisfactory, unable to save from sin (Heb. 10:4). The shedding of blood was, nevertheless, important, because it pointed to Jesus, who alone brings about forgiveness and reconciliation.

Rivers of animal blood were spilled over the centuries in the Old Testament—sacrificial system. However gruesome, it was to teach an object lesson about the cost of sin. And yet, those were only animals, which, in the end, could never bring salvation. In contrast, what does the death of Christ, the only means of solving the sin problem, tell us about the true cost of sin?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The Aaronic high priests had to present themselves before God repeatedly, because the “redemption” their ministry procured was of a temporary character. But Christ entered in once for all, to be enthroned there in perpetuity, because the redemption procured by Him is perfect in nature and eternal in effect.

This perfect redemption can be understood even more fully by the imagery and language used to describe the sanctuary and Christ’s work there. Ellen White says every element in the sanctuary has a lesson for us (see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, p. 406). Without pushing this too far it may prove valuable to examine a few random elements of the earthly sanctuary and see what they reveal to us about Christ’s work for us in the heavenly sanctuary today.

For instance, we are told that a perpetual incense burned in the earthly temple. “Its ‘continual’ burning teaches us that day by day we are to come before the Lord in prayer.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 658, “Perpetual incense.”

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Leviticus 1:4; Psalm 103:20, 21; Hosea 6:6; Romans 6:12-14; Hebrews 9:1-5.

1. The author of Hebrews discusses the fact that the earthly sanctuary described in the Old Testament was meant to reflect the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. In what sense is the heavenly sanctuary real? Do you think the author meant to say that it has a physical location?
2. Hebrews states the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament—unlike Christ’s sacrifice—never had the power to atone for sin. Why, then, do the books of Moses seem to give the impression they do? Do you think people of the Old Testament period were aware these sacrifices were not ultimately effective? Does it matter?
3. In Hebrews 9:5, the author briefly mentions the cherubim represented in the earthly sanctuary service but chooses not to discuss them in detail. Then, as now, many people had a misunderstanding of, or an unhealthy fascination with, angels. What are some of the ways in which people have a distorted view of the role of angels? What does the Bible teach in regard to these beings?
4. Hebrews emphasizes the work Christ does in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of the whole world. But what does the sanctuary service suggest to us about the way Christ works in each individual life?
5. Why do you think many people of the Old Testament period lost their sense of the significance of the sanctuary service?

Wednesday

August 6

THE SANCTUARY SERVICE (Heb. 8:1-3; 9:5-7).

In the above texts, notice those involved in the sanctuary service. The apostle mentions cherubim, priests, high priests, the minister in the sanctuary, and the mediator. The titles “priest” and “high priest” refer to descendants of Aaron, as well as to Jesus, who is the ultimate Priest and High Priest and whose ministry alone can solve the sin problem. This, again, leads to a key theme of Hebrews: the superiority of Christ and His ministry over all that came before.

The word *minister* (*leitourgos*) is used for the angels in Hebrews 1:7 and for Jesus, the Minister in the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus’ ministry (*leitourgia*; Heb. 8:6) is the real “liturgy.” *Mediator* is found three times in Hebrews (8:6; 9:15; 12:24) and is applied to Jesus only.

The cherubim mentioned in Hebrews 9:5 are the two golden figures placed on the mercy seat in the earthly sanctuary. What do they symbolize? See also Ezek. 1:5-14, 22-26; 10:1, 4, 18-22; Rev. 4:6-8.

Cherubim are not just mythological figures but real beings (Gen. 3:24) living in the presence of God. They form the entourage of the majesty of the universe in His sanctuary.

“There can be no doubt that the Biblical cherubim designate a class of angels. Nowhere are they represented as objects of worship, and therefore cannot have been divine beings.”—*SDA Bible Dictionary* (revised edition), pp. 189, 190.

Hebrews is strongly opposed to angel worship (see Heb. 1:5-14). This may be a reason for not mentioning the heavenly counterpart of the cherubim in the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary.

There’s no question, though, that angelic beings are mentioned in the context of the sanctuary. What exactly they do, we don’t know. However, when we understand the role of the sanctuary service and what God is accomplishing there, then perhaps we can better understand the function of angels, which comes from a word that also means “messenger.” Perhaps, because they are so closely involved, they themselves can witness the work of Christ in the sanctuary, which is a work He does in behalf of saving humanity, a work that has implications for the entire universe.

Think of the heavenly sanctuary and Christ’s work there for us, all in the context of the great controversy, in which great issues regarding the character of God are at stake before all creation. In this context, what role can you see for the angels in the heavenly sanctuary?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Numbers 19:6 lists other elements of the earthly sanctuary structure that contain insights into the character of God, as well. Hyssop, cedar, and scarlet were used in its construction, the “very items . . . used in the cleansing of the leper” from sin.—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 887, “Cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet.” Hyssop represented purification. Scarlet was a symbol of sin, and cedarwood was a symbol of the sweet, holy fragrance and incorruption of Christ’s perfect sacrifice to save humanity from the leprosy of sin.

Scripture also tells us priests wore pomegranates and golden bells on the hems of their priestly garments. Pomegranates, a fruit native to the Mediterranean, where Jesus was born, has long been respected as a blood purifier, with medicinal properties. Each tiny tear-shaped seed, the color of blood, then, is a fitting reminder and symbol of the pure blood of Christ shed to cleanse our sins. Additionally, the sound of the bells on the priests’ garments reminded people the priests were interceding for them. “The bells and pomegranates remind us that by faith we may now enter boldly ‘into the holiest by the blood of

WITNESSING

In the book of Hebrews, there are words such as *sacrifice*, *without spot*, *High Priest*, *holy place*, and *mercy seat*. There are many who read these words but do not fully understand what they mean or how they relate to us today. A very effective witnessing tool is to use something people can relate to as a way to explain what they have difficulty understanding.

For example, each year millions donate blood and other body organs and tissues. An individual may indicate on his driver’s license he would like to be an organ donor in the event of an accidental death. If he chooses to do so, a symbol is printed on the front of his driver’s license, showing he is a donor.

Some organs such as the kidney may be donated from living donors. A person can donate one kidney and still survive on the other healthy kidney.

Although donating blood and other organs may be safe, it still can pose some risk (however small) for the donor. The donor gives up something of great value to save another life, taking the chance there will be no health risk to himself.

When Jesus shed His blood, He gave up something of great value. He gave His life to save not just one but every human being who ever lived or ever will. He gave not just a part but all of Himself for us. And He gave up all of heaven to do so!

In sanctuary language, Jesus is our Sacrifice, the Lamb without spot or blemish. He is the High Priest who sits in the Most Holy Place at the right hand of the heavenly Father. And because of His sacrifice and ministry for us, we may “come boldly into the throne of grace . . . [to] obtain mercy” (Heb. 4:16).

Thursday

August 7

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION.

Read these verses from Hebrews. All have a similar theme. What is it? Heb. 1:3; 2:17; 8:12; 9:26; 9:28; 10:12; 10:17; 13:11, 12.

The fall of Adam and Eve changed the relationship of humans to God. And though it dramatically altered life on earth, bringing disease, death, and suffering, the real tragedy of sin exists in the rupture between heaven and earth, in the chasm between the creature and Creator. All that sin causes us to do to ourselves and to each other is because of what sin has done to us and to our relationship with God. Sin ruptured that relationship, caused an estrangement, and created a division between the Creator and the created so that the created became separated from the only Source of his or her existence, life, and purpose. This separation comes with consequences more dire than if the umbilical cord were severed in the womb, because what the created lost because of sin wasn't just physical, but spiritual, even eternal.

First and foremost, then, it was to heal this infinite and eternal rift that Jesus Christ came, died, and now ministers in heaven in our behalf.

And this is what Hebrews is about: God healing the rift between heaven and earth. It's an overview of the whole plan of salvation, beginning with Christ's death on the cross (symbolized by the sacrifice) and continuing with Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary.

Indeed, in Scripture the emphasis is not so much on this problem but on the solution: forgiveness of sin, liberation from sin, and the power to overcome sin. A key theme in Hebrews is purification. God wants not only to forgive us but to purify us, cleanse us, and make us holy. All this is now possible but only because of the superior sacrifice of Jesus, His superior blood, and His superior ministry in our behalf.

What we have in Hebrews, then, is God showing us what the problem is and how He is solving it. Read again the texts for today. Though all talk about sin, they talk about the remedy too. Focus on what those texts say Jesus has done for us in regard to the question of sin. Write a paragraph expressing the wonderful hope found in them for us, focusing particularly on the results of what Christ has done.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Jesus'. . . . By faith we too may hear the sound from the sanctuary that directs our hearts and minds upward to where Christ sits at the right hand of God to make intercession for us."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 650: "A golden bell."

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: "Visualize a person on the *Titanic* facing the imminent expectation of drowning and death, but then being placed in a lifeboat. That is *rescue*. Then picture the person now in the lifeboat removed from danger and death. That is *safety*. Now picture an ocean liner coming alongside the lifeboat and hoisting it and its passengers aboard ship. Now they enjoy *security* and *soundness* of mind. All three ideas are included in the biblical concept of salvation."—Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publications, 2000), p. 4.

Thought Questions:

1. "In his life, Christ is an example, showing us how to live. In his death, he is a sacrifice, satisfying for our sins. In his resurrection, he is a conqueror. In his ascension, he is a king. In his intercession, he is a high priest."—*Martin Luther*. Through His journey on earth, Jesus took on multiple roles, one of which was to be our High Priest. This was a heavenly appointment. God chose His very Son to take on this role, so the gulf between humans and God would be bridged. Could Jesus have taken

on the role of High Priest while refusing the role of Savior? Explain. In what ways did Jesus' priesthood shine through His journey on earth?

2. While on earth, Jesus' life emphasized service. Even in heaven, as our High Priest, He serves. How are both services similar? How are they different? What kind of services does God expect from us, both as individuals and as a church?

Application Questions:

1. Imagine that all of a sudden the atmosphere is sprinkled with a magical "redemption dust" that saves and redeems relationships. How differently would you function in such an atmosphere? What would be the most awesome thing that could happen in your workplace? In what ways could your "redemptive" nature draw others to the Cross, the true place of redemption?

2. In light of Jesus as your Savior and High Priest, write a personal prayer that combines boldness and humility in approaching God. How different would this prayer be without Jesus as your Mediator?

Friday

August 8

FURTHER STUDY:

Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. To many it has been a mystery why so many sacrificial offerings were required in the old dispensation, why so many bleeding victims were led to the altar. But the great truth that was to be kept before men, and imprinted upon mind and heart, was this, ‘Without shedding of blood is no remission.’ In every bleeding sacrifice was typified ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ Christ Himself was the originator of the Jewish system of worship, in which, by types and symbols, were shadowed forth spiritual and heavenly things. Many forgot the true significance of these offerings; and the great truth that through Christ alone there is forgiveness of sin, was lost to them. The multiplying of sacrificial offerings, the blood of bulls and goats, could not take away sin (*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 2, 1893).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 932, 933.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Revelation 7:15 and 16:17 are quite clear: The throne of God is in the heavenly temple. In Hebrews, the throne is found four times (1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2). When we read the context of Hebrews 4:16 and Hebrews 8:2, we get the same impression: The throne is found in the sanctuary. This is supported by Old Testament evidence such as Psalm 11:4 and Isaiah 6:1, which state, “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” The sanctuary is the center of God’s government. Salvation, assistance, and judgment proceed from God’s dwelling place, His palace, which is the sanctuary. In fact, the Old Testament term for temple (*hkl*) is also translated “palace.” In what ways is this idea, that of the sanctuary being where God’s throne resides, important to our understanding of Christ’s ministry in heaven?**
- 2. From what you’ve studied so far, if someone were to ask you, Why is Christ’s ministry in heaven important? what would you respond?**

SUMMARY: Hebrews is very rich when it comes to words related to the sanctuary. Indeed, the sanctuary concept forms the foundation for understanding the entire book. And what this concept teaches us is that God wants to be close to us and dwell among us. Through Jesus we now have access to the Majesty of heaven and can rejoice in the assurance of salvation.