

# Hebrews 9:3-5 Commentary

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

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## The Epistle to the Hebrews

| INSTRUCTION<br>Hebrews 1-10:18                   |  |                                  |                                      |  | EXHORTATION<br>Hebrews 10:19-13:25                |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Superior Person<br>of Christ<br>Hebrews 1:1-4:13 | Superior Priest<br>in Christ<br>Hebrews 4:14-10:18 |                                  |                                      |  | Superior Life<br>In Christ<br>Hebrews 10:19-13:25 |
| BETTER THAN<br>PERSON<br>Hebrews 1:1-4:13        | BETTER<br>PRIESTHOOD<br>Heb 4:14-7:28              | BETTER<br>COVENANT<br>Heb 8:1-13 | BETTER<br>SACRIFICE<br>Heb 9:1-10:18 |  | BETTER<br>LIFE                                    |
| MAJESTY<br>OF<br>CHRIST                          | MINISTRY<br>OF<br>CHRIST                           |                                  |                                      |  | MINISTERS<br>FOR<br>CHRIST                        |

|                              |      |
|------------------------------|------|
| DOCTRINE                     | DUTY |
| DATE WRITTEN:<br>ca. 64-68AD |      |

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

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Hebrews 9:3 **Behind the second veil** there was a **tabernacle** which is **called the Holy of Holies** ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [meta de to deutron katapetasma skene he legomene](#) ([PPFSN](#)) [Hagia Hagion](#).

**Amplified:** But [inside] beyond the second curtain or veil, [there stood another] tabernacle [division] known as the Holy of Holies. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** Behind the second curtain there was that part of the tabernacle which was called the Holy of Holies. ([Westminster Press](#))

**KJV:** And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

**NLT:** Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Inside, beyond the curtain, was the inner tent called the holy of holies ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** And after the second veil, a tent which is called the Holy of Holies

**Young's Literal:** and after the second veil a tabernacle that is called 'Holy of holies,'

## AND BEHIND THE SECOND VEIL, THERE WAS A TABERNACLE WHICH IS CALLED THE HOLY OF HOLIES

- Heb 6:19; 10:20; Exodus 26:31-33; 36:35-38; 40:3,21; 2Chronicles 3:14; Isaiah 25:7; Matthew 27:51
- Hebrews 9:8; 10:19; 1Kings 8:6
- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**The second veil** - (see **diagram of the Tabernacle**) There was one door into the outer courtyard then the brazen altar and then the bronze laver and then the first **veil** or **screen** (see Exodus 26 below), the **second veil** screening off the holy of holies from the holy place.

**Spurgeon-** The child of God is a priest, and as a priest he is sanctified to enter within the veil. He is now permitted to go into the place that was once within the veil, but which is not so now, because the veil is rent in two.

**Veil** ([2665](#)) (**katapetasma** from **petannumi** = before + **kata**) literally means that which is spread out or that which spreads out downwards and thus was a word used as a technical term for temple curtains.

**Katapetasma** - 6x in 6v - veil

Matthew 27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

Mark 15:38 And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Luke 23:45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

Hebrews 6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

Hebrews 9:3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,

Hebrews 10:20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

**Tabernacle** ([ISBE Article](#)) (4633) (**skene**) means tent, booth, cloth hut and here specifically the tabernacle which was made largely of skins and was designed to be portable, which emphasizes the essence of impermanence. The tabernacle gave every impression of being a temporary structure. It is fascinating that while there are only two chapters devoted to the creation, there are some fifty chapters that deal with the Tabernacle (esp Ex 25-40). As so many expositors over the years have noted, the Tabernacle was essentially a "giant portrait of Jesus Christ" (See related study on **Covenant: Abrahamic versus Mosaic**). Everywhere you look in the Tabernacle you can see the Messiah.

ISBE explains that...

In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, the **veil** that hung between the two holy chambers of the tabernacle is mentioned 23 times (Ex 26:31, etc.). In several places it is termed "**the veil of the screen**" and it is distinguished from "the screen for the door of the tabernacle" (Ex 35:12,15; 39:34,38). By the latter is meant the curtain that hung outside the holy place, i.e. at the tabernacle entrance. Ex 26:31 informs us that the **veil** was made of fine-twined linen, and that its colors were blue and purple and scarlet. It was embroidered with cherubim. At each removal of the tabernacle the veil was used to enwrap the ark of the testimony (Nu 4:5). From its proximity to this central object of the Hebrew ceremonial system, the **veil** is termed "**the veil of the testimony**" (Lev 24:3), "**the veil which is before the testimony**" (Ex 27:21), etc.

In Solomon's Temple the **veil** is mentioned but once (2Ch 3:14). It was protected by doors of olive wood (1 Ki 6:31). In the later temple it is alluded to in 1 Macc 1:22. Its presence in Herod's temple is attested by the statement in each of the Synoptists that at the time of Christ's death the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, or in the midst (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45; compare in Mishna, Mid. ii. 1; iv.7). This fact is the basis of the profound truth expressed by the writer to the Hebrews that Jesus, by His sacrificial death, opened for all believers a way into the holiest "**through the veil, that is to say, his flesh**" (Heb 10:20-note). ([Dictionary Article](#))

**Holy of Holies** was the innermost shrine of the sanctuary of Jehovah "The most holy place of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex 26:31, 32,33) was a small cube of 10 cubits (15 ft.) every way. It was divided from the holy Ceiled by curtains which bore cherubic figures embroidered in blue and purple and scarlet (Ex 26:1), it contained no furniture but the Ark of the Covenant, covered by a slab of gold called the MERCY-SEAT (which see), and having within it only the two stone tables of the Law (see TABERNACLE; ARK OF THE COVENANT). Only the high priest, and he but once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, was permitted to enter within the veil, clothed in penitential garments, amid a cloud of incense, and with blood of sacrifice (Lev 16:1-31; compare Heb 9:7). ([Holy of Holies](#))

**Spurgeon-** The holy of holies was not open to all men, but only to Jews; and not to all Jews, but only to priests; and not to all priests, but to the high priest alone; and not even to him at all times, or indeed at any time, except on one solitary day in the year.

In **Exodus 26:31-37**, God prescribes **two partitions**...

And you shall make a **veil** of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman.

32 "And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also being of gold, on four sockets of silver.

33 "And you shall hang up the **veil** under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the **veil**; and the **veil** shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies.

34 "And you shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies.

35 "And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side.

36 "And you shall make a **screen** (Hebrew = macak = basic meaning of root is to block. This is the outer veil hanging at the East end of the Holy Place) for the doorway of the tent of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver.

37 "And you shall make five pillars of acacia for the screen, and overlay them with gold, their hooks also being of gold; and you shall cast five sockets of bronze for them.

**God** gave the pattern and **Moses** unconditionally obeyed (a good pattern for all believers)...

Moreover, he (Moses) made the **veil** of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen; he made it with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman.

36 And he made four pillars of acacia for it, and overlaid them with gold, with their hooks of gold; and he cast four sockets of silver for them.

37 And he made a **screen** for the doorway of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver;

In **Exodus 40** Moses refers to the **veil** between the holy of holies and the holy place as a **screen**...

And he (Moses) brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up a **veil** for the **screen**, and screened off the ark of the testimony (in the holy of holies), (note this next phrase) just as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Exodus 40:21)

**Hebrews 9:4** having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** chrousoun echousa (PAPFSN) thumiaterion kai ten kiboton tes diathekes perikekalummenen (RPPFSA) pantothēn chrusio. en e stamnos chruse echousa (PAPFSN) to manna kai e rhabdos Aaron e blastēsasa (AAPFSN) kai ai plakēs tes diathekes.

**Amplified:** It had the golden altar of incense and the ark (chest) of the covenant, covered over with wrought gold. This [ark] contained a golden jar which held the manna and the rod of Aaron that sprouted and the [two stone] slabs of the covenant [bearing the Ten Commandments]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** It was approached by means of the golden altar of incense, and it had in it the ark of the covenant, which was covered all over with gold. In the ark there was the golden pot with the manna and Aaron's rod which budded and the tables of the covenant. ([Westminster Press](#))

**KJV:** Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

**NLT:** In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** containing the golden jar of manna, Aaron's budding staff and the stone tablets inscribed with the words of the actual agreement. Above these things were fixed representations of the cherubim of glory, casting their shadow over the ark's covering, known as the mercy seat. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** having a golden censer and the ark of the testament overlaid round about with gold, in which was a golden pot having the manna, and the rod of Aaron, the one that budded, and the tablets of the testament

**Young's Literal:** having a golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid all round about with gold, in which is the golden pot having the manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded, and the tables of the covenant,

**HAVING A GOLDEN ALTAR OF INCENSE:** chrousoun echousa (PAPFSN) thumiaterion:

- Leviticus 16:12; 1Kings 7:50; Revelation 8:3
- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Spurgeon-** I will take you for a moment into that which was called the holy place under the old Jewish law, the holy of holies. What was there? Only two things that could be seen. The one was the golden censer, and the other was the mercy seat, and both of these things were instructive. Now, when you go to the Lord to worship, the first thing you want is somebody to render your worship acceptable. See there, in the person of your Lord Jesus Christ, a golden censer, representing the sweet merit of His prevalent intercession by which you also are accepted. When the high priest went into the holy place, he filled this golden censer and waved it to and fro till the sweet perfumed smoke went up before the mercy seat. That is just what Jesus does in heaven for us. We burn the incense here below, and the sweet perfume of His merit continually ascends before the throne of the Most High and Holy God, and beneath the cloud of the smoke we worship. Jesus becomes a sanctuary for us, and you can never worship God aright till you feel that Jesus' merits go with your worship. If your prayers are perfumed with the incense of your own merits, and you think they will be acceptable, you do not know what you are doing. But if you see that golden censer, and look to God through the smoke of Jesus'

merits, then do you really worship, and Christ thus becomes to you a sanctuary.

**Golden altar of incense** - Note that several Bible versions (Darby, KJV, NKJV, Weymouth, Young's Literal) translate this Greek word (see below) as a **censer** not an **altar of incense**.

**Altar of incense (censer)** ([2369](#)) (**thumiasterion**) strictly speaking in secular usage described a utensil or container for burning incense. However the Jewish historian Josephus uses **thumiasterion** to describe the **altar of incense** in the Jewish Temple, which would be a metonymy. **Metonymy** refers to a figure of speech where one uses the name of one thing (the utensil for burning incense) for the name of another thing (the altar of incense) of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated.

In the Septuagint (LXX) **thumiasterion** is used only twice (2Chr 26:19, Ezekiel 8:11) and both times describes a censer or utensil of incense and not the **altar of incense**. It appears therefore that what the author is describing with the term **thumiasterion** is the taking of coals of fire from the altar of incense in the Holy Place into the Holy of holies once each year on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16:12,13). Such an explanation would present no contradiction with the location of the altar of incense in front of the **second veil**. (Ex 40:26, Ex 40:1, 2, 3, 4, 5). It is amazing that some commentaries go so far as to suggest that the writer must not have been familiar with the Old Testament Tabernacle and simply "slipped up"! This is a highly unlikely and very speculative explanation.

This **altar of incense** was gold-overlaid acacia wood, 11/2' square and about 3' high. On this altar were placed the burning coals from the bronze altar in the courtyard, where sacrifice was made.

**ISBE** has this note on the **altar of incense** explaining that

Ex 30:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 contains the commands for the construction and use of an altar of incense. The material was shittim wood, the dimensions one cubit by one by two, and it also had horns. Its top and sides were overlaid with gold and it was surrounded by a crown or rim of gold. For facility of transport it had golden rings and staves. It stood before the veil in front of the ark. Solomon also constructed an altar of incense (1Ki 6:20; 7:48; 1Ch 28:18), cedar replacing shittim wood. The altar of incense reappears in 1 Macc [1:21](#); [4:49](#).

**Incense** is from "the Latin "to burn," "a mixture of gums or spices and the like, used for the purpose of producing a perfume when burned;" or the perfume itself of the spices, etc., burned in worship. The incense employed in the service of the tabernacle walls compounded of the perfumes stacte, onycha, galbanum and pure frankincense. All incense which was not made of these ingredients was forbidden to be offered. (Exodus 30:9) Aaron, as high priest, was originally appointed to offer incense each morning and evening. The times of offering incense were specified in the instructions first given to Moses. (Exodus 30:7,8) When the priest entered the holy place with the incense, all the people were removed from the temple, and from between the porch and the altar. Cf. (Luke 1:10) Profound silence was observed among the congregation who were praying without, cf. (Revelation 8:1 [\[note\]](#)) and at a signal from the perfect the priest cast the incense on the fire and, bowing reverently toward the holy of holies, retired slowly backward. The offering of incense has formed part of the religious ceremonies of most ancient nations. It was an element in the idolatrous worship of the Israelites. (2Chronicles 34:25; Jeremiah 11:12,17; 48:35) It would seem to be symbolical, not of itself, but of that which makes acceptable, the intercession of Christ. In (Revelation 8:3 [\[note\]](#); Re 8:4 [\[note\]](#)) the incense is of as something distinct from offered with the prayers of, all the saints cf. (Luke 1:10) and in Re 6:8 [\[note\]](#) It is the golden vials, and not the odors or incense, which are said to be the prayers of saints. ([Incense](#))

**AND THE ARK OF THE COVENANT COVERED ON ALL SIDES WITH GOLD, IN WHICH WAS A GOLDEN JAR HOLDING THE MANNA: *tên kibôtôn tês diathêkês perikekalummenen (RPPFSA) pantóthen chrusio en e stamnos chrusê echousa (PAPFSN) to manna:***

- Exodus 25:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16; 26:33; 37:1, 2, 3, 4, 5; 39:35; 40:3,21
- Exodus 16:33,34
- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Spurgeon-** The presence of God, as you know, in the temple and the tabernacle was known by the shining of the bright light called the Shekinah between the wings of the cherubim over the ark of the covenant. We often forget that the presence of God in the most holy place was a matter of faith to all but the high priest. Once in the year the high priest went within the awful veil, but we do not know that even he ever dared to look upon the blaze of splendor. God dwells in light that no man may approach. The smoke of the incense from the priest's censer was needed partly to veil the exceeding glory of the divine presence, lest even those chosen eyes should suffer blindness. No one else went into the hallowed shrine, and only he once in the year.

**The Ark of the Covenant** - It was here that God manifested Himself in a bright shining cloud, the Shekinah glory cloud (See

discussion - **Glory of the LORD**). It was the only site where God could be approached with the blood of atonement or covering on the Day of Atonement.

The ark was not in the Herod's temple, but in its stead was a stone basement (called "the stone of foundation") some three fingers high.

**Covenant** (1242) (**diatheke** [word study] from **dia** = two + **tithemi** = to place) pictures that which is placed between two and thus a covenant is something placed between two, an arrangement between two parties. It was a commonly used in the Greco-Roman world to define a legal transaction in settling an inheritance and would correspond with our modern term of "a will" which defines how that which belongs to the testator (the one who made the will) will be divided among the heirs.

**The manna** - This manna was supernaturally preserved by God, because otherwise it would rotted within one day. The manna would serve to remind Israel of God's provision for them in the wilderness wanderings.

The Rabbis believed that in the future Elijah would restore to Israel the container of **manna**, the flask of sprinkling water and the jar of anointing oil.

**Smith's Bible Dictionary** writes that the **Ark of the Covenant** was...

The first piece of the tabernacle furniture, for which precise directions were delivered. [Exod 25](#).

I. *Description.* -- It appears to have been an oblong chest of shittim (acacia) wood, 2 1/2 cubits long by 1 1/2 broad and deep. Within and without gold was overlaid on the wood, and on the upper side or lid, which was edged round about with gold, the mercy-seat was placed. The ark was fitted with rings, one at each of the four corners, and through these were passed staves of the same wood similarly overlaid, by which it was carried by the Kohathites. (Numbers 7:9; 10:21) The ends of the staves were visible without the veil in the holy place of the temple of Solomon. (1Kings 8:8) The ark, when transported, was enveloped in the "veil" of the dismantled tabernacle, in the curtain of badgers' skins and in a blue cloth over all, and was therefore not seen. (Numbers 4:5,20)

II. Its purpose was to contain inviolate the divine autograph of the two tables, that "covenant" from which it derived its title. It was also probably a reliquary for the pot of manna and the rod of Aaron.

III. *History* --Before David's time its abode was frequently shifted. It sojourned among several, probably Levitical, families, (1Samuel [7:1](#); 2Samuel [6:3,11](#); 1Chronicles 13:13; 15:24,25) in the border villages of eastern Judah; and did not take its place in the tabernacle, but dwelt in curtains, i.e. in a separate tent pitched for it in Jerusalem by David. Subsequently the temple, when completed, received, in the installation of the ark in its shrine, the signal of its inauguration by the effulgence of divine glory instantly manifested. It was probably taken captive or destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Esdr. [10:22](#), so that there was no ark in the second temple. ([See longer article in ISBE](#))

#### AND AARON'S ROD WHICH BUDDERED: kai he rhabdos aaron hê blastêsasa (1AAP):

- Numbers 17:5,8,10; Psalm 110:2,3
- Exodus 25:16,21; 26:33; 34:29; 40:3,20,21; Deuteronomy 10:2, 3, 4, 5; 1Kings 8:9,21; 2Chronicles 5:10
- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Aaron's rod which budded** - This rod was given in the Old Testament as a "sign against the rebels" who were grumbling against Moses, so that they might cease their grumbling and not die! The **rod which budded** was to thereafter serve as a gracious warning from God not to grumble against God.

**Numbers 17:5** "And it will come about that the **rod** of the man whom I choose will **sprout** (Hebrew = parach = bud, sprout, send out shoots; Lxx = ekblastano - sprout out, be caused to grow out). Thus I shall lessen from upon Myself the grumblings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you."

6 Moses therefore spoke to the sons of Israel, and all their leaders gave him **arod** apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' households, twelve **rods**, with the **rod of Aaron** among their **rods**.

7 So Moses deposited the **rods** before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.

8 Now it came about on the next day that Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the **rod of**

**Aaron** for the house of Levi had **sprouted** and **put forth buds** and **produced blossoms**, and it **bore ripe almonds**.

9 Moses then brought out all the **rods** from the presence of the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his **rod**.

10 But the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the **rod of Aaron** before the **testimony** to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me, so that they should not die."

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word in Numbers 17:8 for ripe almonds is *shaged* which means awakening or the awakening one, which is an allusion to an almond blossom, for these blossoms were the first to bloom in the spring, their pinkish-white blossoms always appearing before the leaves. Read the Numbers 17 passage above and notice that twelve dead or inanimate rods were placed before Jehovah in the Tent of the Testimony (the Tabernacle), and life came forth from only one. Some see this as a foreshadowing of a future Spring "Awakening One" (speaking obviously of Christ's resurrection indicative of His return to life from the dead), which in one sense is true but which might be pushing the original intended meaning somewhat.

ISBE has this note on Aaron's Rod...

**AARON'S ROD** - (Nu 17:1-13 and Heb 9:4): Immediately after the incidents connected with the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against the leadership of Moses and the priestly primacy of Aaron (Nu 16:1-50), it became necessary to indicate and emphasize the Divine appointment of Aaron. Therefore, at the command of Yahweh, Moses directs that twelve almond rods, one for each tribe with the prince's name engraved thereon, be placed within the Tent of the Testimony. When Moses entered the tent the following day, he found that Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed and borne fruit, "the three stages of vegetable life being thus simultaneously visible." When the miraculous sign was seen by the people, they accepted it as final; nor was there ever again any question of Aaron's priestly right. The rod was kept "before the testimony" in the sanctuary ever after as a token of the Divine will (Nu 17:10). The writer of Hebrews, probably following a later Jewish tradition, mentions the rod as kept in the Holy of Holies within the ark (Heb 9:4; compare 1Ki 8:9). ([ISBE Article](#))

#### AND THE TABLES OF THE COVENANT: kai ai plakes tes diathekes:

- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**The tables of the covenant** - see Ex 25:16f; Ex 31:18; Deut 9:9; 10:5. This refers to what we classically think of as the "Ten Commandments" (if you are as old as me, this phrase conjures up the image of Charlton Heston portraying Moses holding the tablets in his hands in the classic movie The Ten Commandments.) We see the origin of the tables in Exodus 24...

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you **the stone tablets** with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." (Exodus 24:12)

They were also called **the tablets of the Testimony**, tablets of stone in (Exodus 31:18) and the tablets of stone, **the tablets of the covenant** (Deut 9:9).

Note that **1 Kings 8** states that the Ark contained the **tables of the covenant** but makes no mention of the other items...

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.

Ryrie commenting on **1 Kings 8:9** writes that...

Aaron's rod, and manna apparently... had been lost by this time. Some think they were never placed in the ark but alongside it; (cf, Ex 16:33, 34; Nu 17:10.)

Hebrews 9:5 and [above](#) it were the [cherubim](#) of [glory overshadowing](#) the [mercy seat](#); but of [these things](#) we [cannot now speak in detail](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [huperano de autes Cheroubin](#) doxes [kataskiazonta](#) ([PAPNPN](#)) [to hilasterion](#); [peri on ouk estin](#) ([3SPA](#)) [nun legein](#) ([PAN](#)) [kata meros](#).

**Amplified:** Above [the ark] and overshadowing the mercy seat were the representations of the cherubim [winged creatures which were the symbols] of glory. We cannot now go into detail about these things. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** Above it there were the cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat; but this is not the place to speak about all these things in detail. ([Westminster Press](#))

**KJV:** And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

**NLT:** The glorious cherubim were above the Ark. Their wings were stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain all of these things now. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Above these things were fixed representations of the cherubim of glory, casting their shadow over the ark's covering, known as the mercy seat. (All this is full of meaning but we cannot enter now into a detailed explanation.) ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** and over it the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat, concerning which things we cannot now speak in detail.

**Young's Literal:** and over it cherubim of the glory, overshadowing the mercy-seat, concerning which we are not now to speak particularly.

#### AND ABOVE IT WERE THE CHERUBIM OF GLORY OVERSHADOWING THE MERCY SEAT: *huperano de autes cheroubim doxes kataskiazonta (PAPNPN) to hilasterion:*

- Exodus 25:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 37:6, 7, 8, 9; Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 7:89; 1Samuel 4:4; 1Kings 8:6,7; 2Kings 19:15; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Ep 3:10; 1Peter 1:12
- He 4:16; Lev 16:2,13; 1Chronicles 28:11
- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Cherubim** ([5502](#)) is the transliterated Hebrew word describing the two golden figures of living creatures with two wings which were fastened to the lid of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies (tabernacle and Solomon's temple) in such a manner that their faces were turned towards each other and down towards the lid, which they overshadowed with their expanded wings. Between these figures God was regarded as having fixed His dwelling place. For Moses records...

And you shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the **mercy seat** (Hebrew = [kapporet](#) = the lid that covered the ark of the testimony) that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you. (Exodus 30:6)

The following description is **Smith's Bible Dictionary** summary...

The symbolical figure so called was a composite creature-form which finds a parallel in the religious insignia of Assyria, Egypt and Persia, e.g. the sphinx, the winged bulls and lions of Nineveh, etc. A cherub guarded paradise. (Genesis 3:24) Figures of Cherubim were placed on the mercy-seat of the ark. (Exodus 25:18) A pair of colossal size overshadowed it in Solomon's temple with the canopy of their contiguously extended wings. (1Kings 6:27) Those on the ark were to be placed with wings stretched forth, one at each end of the mercy-seat. Their wings were to be stretched upwards, and their faces "towards each other and towards the mercy-seat." It is remarkable that with such precise directions as to their position, attitude and material, nothing, save that they were winged, is said concerning their shape. (see [Smith's Dictionary](#))

**Cherubim** (plural of cherub) Through the influence of the Septuagint, cherubim was used in the earlier English versions, also as a singular, hence, the plural was made to sound "cherubims." The etymology of the word cannot be ascertained. (See [Cherubim](#))

**Naves Topic Cherubim** has the following notes...

- Eastward of the garden of Eden, Ge 3:24.
- In the tabernacle, Ex. 25:18, 19, 20; 37:7, 8, 9.
- Ark rested beneath the wings of, 1Ki 8:6, 7; 2Chr 5:7, 8; Heb 9:5
- Figures of,
- embroidered on walls of tabernacle, Ex. 26:1; 36:8;

- on the veil, Ex. 26:31; 36:35.
- In the temple, 1Ki 6:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29; 2Chr. 3:10, 11, 12, 13.
- Figures of,
- on the veil, 2Chr. 3:14;
- walls, 1Ki 6:29-35; 2Chr 3:7;
- bowls, 1Ki 7:29, 36.
- In Ezekiel's vision of the temple, Ezek. 41:18, 19, 20, 25
- Figurative Ezek. 28:14, 16
- Symbolical Ezek 1; Ezek 10:1-20

**The cherubim of glory** - These symbolically guarded access to God even as the living cherubim guarded the entrance to Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve in Genesis

So He (Jehovah Elohim, the LORD God) drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the **Cherubim**, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. (**Genesis 3:24**).

In his commentary on [Genesis](#), the Plymouth Brethren writer [C. H. Mackintosh](#) writes the following on this passage in Genesis 3:24...

The closing verses of this chapter are full of instruction. Fallen man, in his fallen state, must not be allowed to eat of the fruit of the **tree of life**, for that would entail upon him endless wretchedness in this world. To take of the **tree of life**, and eat, and live forever, in our present condition, would be unmingled misery. The **tree of life** can only be tasted in resurrection. To live forever, in a frail tabernacle, in a body of sin and death, would be intolerable. Wherefore, the Lord God **drove out the man**. He drove him out into a world which, everywhere, exhibited the lamentable results of his fall. The **Cherubim and the flaming sword**, too, forbid fallen man to pluck the fruit of the **tree of life**; while God's revelation pointed him to the death and resurrection of the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), as that wherein life was to be found beyond the power of death.

Thus Adam was a happier and a safer man, outside the bounds of Paradise, than he had been within, for this reason — that, within, his life depended upon himself whereas, outside, it depended upon another, even a promised Christ. And as he looked up, and beheld the **Cherubim and the flaming sword**, he could bless the hand that had set them there, **to keep the way of the tree of life**, inasmuch as the same hand had opened a **better**, a safer, and a happier way to that tree (**Ed note**: Compare to the 12 verses mentioning "**better**" in Hebrews... better than angels, better things, better hope, better covenant, better sacrifices, better possession, better country, better resurrection, something better, better than the blood of Abel). If the **Cherubim** and flaming sword stopped up the way to Paradise, the Lord Jesus Christ has opened "**a new and living way**" (He 10:20-note) into the holiest of all. **I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**. (John 14:6) In the knowledge of this, the believer now moves onward through a world which is under the curse — where the traces of sin are visible on all hands. He has found his **way**, by faith, to the bosom of the Father; and while he can secretly repose there, he is cheered by the blessed assurance that the One who has conducted him thither, is gone to prepare a place in the many mansions of the Father's house, and that he will soon come again and receive him unto Himself, amid the glory of the Father's kingdom. Thus, in the bosom, the house, and the kingdom of the Father, the believer finds his present portion, his future home and reward. ([Genesis 1-15](#))

The **psalms** make reference to the **cherubim of glory**...

Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, Thou who dost lead Joseph like a flock; **Thou Who art enthroned above the cherubim**, shine forth! (**Psalms 80:1**)

[C H Spurgeon](#) commenting on the **cherubim of glory** writes...

The Lord's especial presence was revealed upon the mercyseat between the cherubim, and in all our pleadings we should come to the Lord by this way: only upon the mercyseat

will God reveal His grace, and only there can we hope to commune with Him. Let us ever plead the Name of Jesus, Who is our true mercyseat, to Whom we may come boldly, and through Whom we may look for a display of the glory of the Lord on our behalf. Our greatest dread is the withdrawal of the Lord's presence, and our brightest hope is the prospect of His return. In the darkest times of Israel, the light of her Shepherd's countenance is all she needs.

The LORD (Jehovah) reigns, let the peoples tremble. He is **enthroned above the cherubim**, let the earth shake! (**Psalm 99:1**)

[C H Spurgeon](#) commenting on the **cherubim of glory** writes...

In grandeur of sublime glory, yet in nearness of mediatorial condescension, Jehovah revealed Himself above the mercyseat, whereon stood the likeness of those flaming ones who gaze upon His glory, and for ever cry, "**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts.**" (**Ed note**: Seraphim in Isaiah 6:2,3) The Lord reigning on that throne of grace which is sprinkled with atoning blood, and veiled with the covering wings of mediatorial love, is above all other revelations wonderful, and fitted to excite emotion among all mankind, hence it is added,

**Let the earth be moved.** Not merely "the people," but the whole earth should feel a movement of adoring awe when it is known that on the mercyseat God sits as universal Monarch. The pomp of heaven surrounds Him, and is symbolized by the outstretched wings of waiting cherubs; let not the earth be less moved to adoration, rather let all her tribes bow before His infinite majesty, yea, let the solid earth itself with reverent tremor acknowledge His presence. (Amen)

**Overshadowing** ([2683](#)) (**kataskiazo** from **kata** = down, over + **skia** = shade, shadow) means literally to cast a shadow upon. This is the only use in the NT (none in Lxx). The present tense pictures the cherubim continually overshadowing the mercy seat.

**Mercy seat** ([2435](#)) (**hilasterion** or **hilasterios** from **hilaskomai** = propitiate, expiate <> from **hileos** = appeased, merciful, propitious) means to appease and render favorable. In addition (and as used here in Hebrews) **hilasterion** identifies the place of propitiation. See the following for dictionary discussions of **mercy seat** ([Mercy Seat](#) • [Mercy-seat](#) • [Mercy-Seat, The](#) • [Mercyseat](#))

**Thayer** writes that the **hilasterion** referred to "the well-known cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of holies, which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim on the annual day of atonement (this rite signifying that the life of the people, the loss of which they had merited by their sins, was offered to God in the blood as the life of the victim, and that God by this ceremony was appeased)

The only other NT use of **hilasterion** is found in **Romans** in Paul's discussion of justification by faith where he describes **Jesus...**

Whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation (hilasterion)** in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over (deliberated disregarded, let go unpunished) the sins previously committed (see **note** Romans 3:25)

Note that **hilasterios/hilasterion** although used only twice in the NT is one of four closely related words used in the NT:

- (1) **hilaskomai** ([2433](#)) propitiate, conciliate, make gracious, be gracious in [Lu 18:13](#) and Hebrews 2:17 (note)
- (2) **hileos** ([2436](#)) gracious, merciful Mt 16:22 and Hebrews 8:12 (note)
- (3) **hilasmos** ([2434](#)) propitiation, propitiatory sacrifice (1John 2:2, 4:10);
- (4) **hilasterion** ([2435](#)) that which propitiates, means of propitiation, mercy-seat in Ro 3:25-note, He 9:5-note.

**Hilasterion** means a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and in so doing in a sense changes His wrath toward us into favor. God has set the sinner free through Christ, but He has not done so by setting aside the rules. He has set the sinner free in Christ by **satisfying His demands** for justice in the penalty poured out on His Christ. And so God remains just and is able to be the Justifier! Due to sin, a penalty was to be meted out and a price was to be paid. Christ paid that price and suffered that penalty ("redemption" is the price paid to set free slaves, captives, etc). God's wrath had to be appeased, due to man's sin and Christ has appeased that wrath, this appeasement being pictured in the term **propitiation**.

**Satisfaction** is a synonym for **propitiation** and indicates that God's moral requirement ("*the wages of sin is death*" - see Ro 6:23-note) has been completely met by the death of His Son on behalf of each Old and New Testament believer (for each of them

"the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" - see Ro 6:23-note). Christ's once for all sacrifice has fully, perfectly **satisfied** (propitiated) God.

The apostle **John** uses the related word **hilasmos** which pictures that which propitiates or appeases and here states that **Jesus**

Himself is the **propitiation (hilasmos - appeasement, satisfaction)** for our sins... (1John 2:2-note)

**MacDonald** explains the significance of Christ our Propitiation, noting that "by dying for us, He freed us from the guilt of our sins and restored us to God by providing the needed satisfaction and by removing every barrier to fellowship. God can show mercy to us because Christ has satisfied the claims of justice. It is not often that an advocate (or lawyer) pays for his client's sins; yet that is what our Lord has done, and most remarkable of all, He paid for them by the sacrifice of Himself. ([Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

It needs to be clearly understood that **propitiation** is not *placating* a vengeful God but, rather, it is *satisfying* the righteousness and justice of a holy God, thereby making it possible for Him to show mercy righteously. As alluded to earlier, God can now be **just** (His law says sin demands death) and can deal with men graciously and benevolently (**Justifier**).

There are 28 uses of **hilasterion** in the **Septuagint (LXX)** (Ex 25:17-22 [\[see passage below\]](#):

Ex 31:7; 35:12; 37:6, 8; Lev 16:2, 13, 14, 15 ; Numbers 7:89; Ezek 43:14, 17, 20; Amos 9:1).

Notice that all of the uses of **hilasterion** in [Exodus \(Note that the Lxx does not translate uses of Kapporet in Exodus 26:34, 30:6, 37:7, 9, 39:35; 40:20 but for some reason leaves them untranslated in the Greek text\)](#), [Leviticus](#) and [Numbers](#) translate the important Hebrew word **kapporet (see word study)** (from **kaphar - see word study**) = to cover, make atonement. It also meant to cover over with pitch as in Genesis 6:14) which is translated **mercy seat** which was the lid that covered the Ark of the Covenant (Ark of Testimony) in the Holy of Holies.

The **kapporet** was the place of atonement or golden plate of propitiation on which the **High Priest** sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial animal seven times on the Day of Atonement this sprinkling symbolizing the reconciliation of Jehovah and His chosen people. This slab of gold on top of the Ark of the Covenant measured 2.5 by 1.5 cubits and was integrally associated with two golden cherubim facing each other with outstretched wings that came together above the mercy seat. The official description and significance of the **mercy seat** is seen in the passages in Exodus 25.

In Exodus 25 **Moses** records God's instruction to cover the **Ark of the Covenant** with...

a **mercy seat** (Hebrew = [kapporet](#) ; Lxx = hilasterion) of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. And you shall make **two cherubim of gold**, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony (the tablets of stone with the 10 Commandments written by the finger of God) which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; ("*I will keep an appointment with you there*" - the Hebrew word has idea of prearranged meeting) and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. ([Ex 25:17-22](#); cp Nu 7:89)

The godly Plymouth Brethren writer **C H Mackintosh** ([Biography](#)) has the following beautiful devotional thoughts on **Exodus 25**...

This chapter forms the commencement of one of the richest veins in Inspiration's exhaustless mine — a vein in which every stroke of the mattock brings to light untold wealth. We know the mattock with which alone we can work in such a mine, namely, the distinct ministry of the Holy Ghost. Nature can do nothing here. Reason is blind — imagination utterly vain — the most gigantic intellect, instead of being able to interpret the sacred symbols, appears like a bat in the sunshine, blindly dashing itself against the objects which it is utterly unable to discern. We must compel reason and imagination to stand without, while, with a chastened heart, a single eye, and a spiritual mind, we enter the hallowed precincts and gaze upon the deeply significant furniture.

God the Holy Ghost is the only One who can conduct us through the courts of the Lord's house, and expound to our souls the true meaning of all that there meets our view. To attempt the exposition, by the aid of intellect's unsanctified powers, would be infinitely more absurd than to set about the repairs of a watch with a blacksmith's tongs and

hammer.

**"The patterns of things in the heavens"** cannot be interpreted by the natural mind, in its most cultivated form. They must all be read in the light of heaven. Earth has no light which could at all develop their beauties. The One who furnished the patterns can alone explain what the patterns mean. The One Who furnished the beautiful symbols can alone interpret them.

To the human eye there would seem to be a desultoriness (a sense that there is lack of a definite plan) in the mode in which the Holy Ghost has presented the furniture of the tabernacle; but, in reality, as might be expected, there is the most perfect order, the most remarkable precision, the most studious accuracy. From Ex. 25 to Ex. 30, inclusive, we have a distinct section of the Book of Exodus. This section is divided into two parts, the first terminating at Ex. 27:19, and the second as the close of Ex. 30. The former begins with the ark of the covenant, inside the veil, and ends with the brazen altar and the court in which that altar stood. That is, it gives us, in the first place, Jehovah's throne of judgement, whereon He sat as Lord of all the earth; and it conducts us to that place where He met the sinner, in the credit and virtue of accomplished atonement. Then, in the latter, we have the mode of man's approach to God — the privileges, dignities, and responsibilities of those who, as priests, were permitted to draw nigh to the Divine Presence and enjoy worship and communion there. Thus the arrangement is perfect and beautiful. How could it be otherwise, seeing that it is divine? The ark and the brazen altar present, as it were, two extremes. The former was the throne of God established in "justice and judgement." (Ps. 89:19) The latter was the place of approach for the sinner where "mercy and truth" went before Jehovah's face. Man, in himself, dared not to approach the ark to meet God, for **"the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest:"** (Heb 9:8) But God could approach the altar of brass, to meet man as a sinner.

"Justice and judgement" could not admit the sinner in; but "mercy and truth" could bring God out; not, indeed, in that overwhelming brightness and majesty in which He was wont to shine forth from between those mystic supporters of His throne — **"the cherubim of glory"** — but in that gracious ministry which is symbolically presented to us in the furniture and ordinances of the tabernacle.

All this may well remind us of the path trodden by that blessed One, who is the antitype of all these types — the substance of all these shadows (see topic Typology). He travelled from the eternal throne of God in heaven, down to the depths of Calvary's cross. He came from all the glory of the former down into all the shame of the latter, in order that He might conduct His redeemed, forgiven, and accepted people back with Himself, and present them faultless before that very throne which He had left on their account. The Lord Jesus fills up, in His own person and work, every point between the throne of God and the dust of death, and every point between the dust of death and the throne of God. In Him God has come down, in perfect grace, to the sinner; in Him the sinner is brought up, in perfect righteousness, to God. All the way, from the ark to the brazen altar, was marked with the footprints of love; and all the way from the brazen altar to the ark of God was sprinkled with the blood of atonement; and as the ransomed worshipper passes along that wondrous path, he beholds the name of Jesus stamped on all that meets his view. May that name be dearer to our hearts! Let us now proceed to examine the chapters consecutively.

It is most interesting to note here, that the first thing which the Lord communicated to Moses is His gracious purpose to have a sanctuary or holy dwelling place in the midst of His people — a sanctuary composed of materials, which directly point to Christ, His Person, His work, and the precious fruit of that work, as seen in the light, the power, and the varied graces of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, these materials were the fragrant fruit of the grace of God — the voluntary offerings of devoted hearts.

Jehovah, whose majesty, **"the heaven of heavens could not contain,"** was graciously pleased to dwell in a boarded and curtained tent, erected for Him by those who cherished the fond desire to hail His presence amongst them. This tabernacle may be viewed in two

ways: first, as furnishing **"a pattern of things in the heavens;"** and, secondly, as presenting a deeply significant type of the body of Christ. The various materials of which the tabernacle was composed will come before us, as we pass along; we shall, therefore, consider the three comprehensive subjects put before us in this chapter, namely, the ark; the table; and the candlestick.

The **ark of the covenant** occupies the leading place in the divine communications to Moses. Its position, too, in the tabernacle was most marked. Shut in within the veil, in the holiest of all, it formed the base of Jehovah's throne. Its very name conveys to the mind its import. An ark, so far as the word instructs us, is designed to preserve intact whatever is put therein. An ark carried Noah and his family, together with all the orders of creation, in safety over the billows of judgement which covered the earth. An ark, at the opening of this book, was faith's vessel for preserving "a proper child" from the waters of death.

When, therefore, we read of **"the ark of the covenant,"** we are led to believe that it was designed of God to preserve His covenant unbroken, in the midst of an erring people. In it, as we know, the second set of tables were deposited. As to the first set, they were broken in pieces, beneath the mount, showing that man's covenant was wholly abolished — that his work could never, by any possibility, form the basis of Jehovah's throne of government.

**"Justice and judgement are the habitation of that throne,"** whether in its earthly or heavenly aspect. The ark could not contain within its hallowed enclosure, broken tables. Man might fail to fulfil his self-chosen vow; but God's law must be preserved in its divine integrity and perfectness. If God was to set up His throne in the midst of His people, He could only do so in a way worthy of Himself. His standard of judgement and government must be perfect.

**"And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. and thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them."** The ark of the covenant was to accompany the people in all their wanderings. It never rested while they were a travelling or a conflicting host. It moved from place to place in the wilderness. It went before them into the midst of Jordan; it was their grand rallying Point in all the wars of Canaan; it was the sure and certain earnest of power wherever it went. No power of the enemy could stand before that which was the well-known expression of the divine presence and power. The ark was to be Israel's companion in travel, in the desert; and "the staves" and "the rings" were the apt expression of its travelling character.

However, it was not always to be a traveller. "The afflictions of David," as well as the wars of Israel, were to have an end. The prayer was yet to be breathed and answered, **"Arise, O Lord, into thy rest: thou and the Ark of thy strength."** (Ps. 132:8) This most sublime petition had its partial accomplishment in the palmy days of Solomon, when **"the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark, and the staves thereof above. And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day."** (1 Kings 8:6-8) The sand of the desert was to be exchanged for the golden floor of the temple. (1 Kings 6: 30) The wanderings of the ark were to have an end; there was "neither enemy nor evil occurrent," and therefore, "the staves were drawn out."

Nor was this the only difference between the ark in the tabernacle and in the temple. The apostle, speaking of the ark in its wilderness habitation, describes it as **"the ark of the covenant, overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant."** (Heb. 9:4) Such were the contents of the ark in its wilderness journeyings — the pot of manna, the record of Jehovah's faithfulness, in providing for His redeemed in the desert, and Aaron's rod, **"a token against the rebels,"** to **"take away their murmurings."** (Compare Ex.

16:32-39; and Num. 17:10) But when the moment arrived in which "the staves" were to be "drawn out," when the wanderings and wars of Israel were over, the "exceeding magnificent" house was completed, when the sun of Israel's glory had reached, in type, its meridian, as marked by the wealth and splendour of Solomon's reign, then the records of wilderness need and wilderness failure were unnoticed, and nothing remained save that which constituted the eternal foundation of the throne of the God of Israel, and of all the earth. **"There was nothing in the ark, save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb."** (1 Kings 8: 9)

But all this brightness was soon to be overcast by the heavy clouds of human failure and divine displeasure. The rude foot of the uncircumcised was yet to walk across the ruins of that beautiful house, and as faded light and departed glory were yet to elicit the contemptuous "hiss" of the stranger. This would not be the place to follow out these things in detail; I shall only refer my reader to the last notice which the Word of God affords us of "the ark of the covenant," — a notice which carries us forward to a time when human folly and sin shall no more disturb the resting-place of that ark, and when neither a curtained tent, nor yet a temple made with hands, shall contain it. (see [Revelation 11:15; 16; 17; 18; 19](#))

The **mercy-seat** comes next in order... Here Jehovah gives utterance to His gracious intention of coming down from the fiery mount to take His place upon the mercy seat. This He could do, inasmuch as the tables of testimony were preserved unbroken beneath, and the symbols of His power, whether in creation or providence, rose on the right hand and on the left — the inseparable adjuncts of that throne on which Jehovah had seated himself — a throne of grace founded upon divine righteousness and supported by justice and judgement. Here the glory of the God of Israel shone forth. From hence He issued His commands, softened and sweetened by the gracious source from whence they emanated, and the medium through which they came — like the beams of the mid-day sun, passing through a cloud, we can enjoy their genial and enlivening influence without being dazzled by their brightness. **"His commandments are not grievous,"** when received from off the mercy-seat, because they come in connection with grace, which gives the ears to hear and the power to obey.

Looking at **the ark and mercy-seat** together, we may see in them a striking figure of Christ, in His Person and work. He having, in His life, magnified the law and made it honourable, became, through death, a propitiation or mercy-seat for every one that believeth. God's mercy could only repose on a pedestal of perfect righteousness. **"Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."** (Ro 5:21) The only proper meeting place between God and man is the point where grace and righteousness meet and perfectly harmonize. Nothing but perfect righteousness could suit God; and nothing but perfect grace could suit the sinner. But where could these attributes meet in one point? Only in the cross. There it is that **"mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."** (Ps. 85:10 - [Spurgeon's note](#))

Thus it is that the soul of the believing sinner finds peace. He sees that God's righteousness and his justification rest upon precisely the same basis, namely, Christ's accomplished work. When man, under the powerful action of the truth of God, takes his place as a sinner, God can, in the exercise of Grace, take His place as a Saviour, and then every question is settled, for the cross having answered all the claims of divine justice, mercy's copious streams can flow unhindered. When a righteous God and a ruined sinner meet, on a blood-sprinkled platform, all is settled for ever — settled in such a way as perfectly glorifies God, and eternally saves the sinner. God must be true, though every man be proved a liar; and when man is so thoroughly brought down to the lowest point of his own moral condition before God as to be willing to take the place which God's truth assigns him, he then learns that God has revealed Himself as the righteous Justifier of such a one. **This must give settled peace to the conscience; and not only so, but impart a capacity to commune with God, and hearken to His holy precepts in the intelligence of that relationship into which divine grace has introduced us.**

Hence, therefore, "the holiest of all" unfolds a truly wondrous scene. The ark, the mercy

seat, the cherubim, the glory! What a sight for the high-priest of Israel to behold as, once a year, he went in within the veil! May the Spirit of God open the eyes of our understandings, that we may understand more fully the deep meaning of those precious types...

Christian reader, your high calling places you in the very midst of all these precious realities. Your place is not merely amid "the patterns of things in the heavens," but amid "the heavenly things themselves." You have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." You are a Priest unto God. "The showbread" is yours. Your place is at "the pure table," to feed on the priestly food, in the light of the Holy Ghost. Nothing can ever deprive you of those divine privileges. They are yours for ever. Let it be your care to watch against everything that might rob you of the enjoyment of them. Beware of all unhallowed tempers, lusts, feelings, and imaginations. Keep nature down — keep the world out --- keep Satan off. May the Holy Ghost fill your whole soul with Christ. Then you will be practically holy and abidingly happy. You will bear fruit, and the Father will be glorified, and your joy shall be full. (And all God's people said "Amen", so be it!)

**Hilasterion** describes the **mercy seat** or cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. It was upon this '**mercy seat**' that the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice once each year on the **Day of Atonement** (described in [Lev 16](#)), which corresponds to the modern day Jewish holiday of **Yom Kippur** that is held on the tenth day of the seventh month, Tishri (7th month of the Jewish year corresponding to September/October). On that day only would the high priest enter within the inner veil bearing the blood of the sin offering (cf. [Heb 9:7](#)).

A second goat was released as an **escape goat** to symbolize the total removal of sin (aza'zel = scapegoat). This solemn day was the only day of fasting prescribed for Israel. It was celebrated by a special sin offering for the whole nation. All the sins of the people were brought symbolically to the Holy of Holies, where blood was sprinkled on the **mercy seat** as a sacrifice to **atone** (supply satisfaction for - **atonement** = making of God and sinners "at one" by the offering of sacrifice and providing a way for humankind to come back into harmonious relation with Him) for them.

Atonement is the act by which God restores a relationship of harmony and unity between Himself and human beings. The word can be broken into three parts that express this great truth in simple but profound terms: "**at-one-ment**." Although Old Testament **believers** were truly forgiven and received genuine atonement through animal sacrifice, the New Testament clearly states that during the Old Testament period God's justice was not served

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (see note Hebrews 10:4)

Atonement was possible

because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed (see note Romans 3:25).

However, God's justice was served in the death of Jesus Christ as a substitute, Hebrews recording that

not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He (both as our Substitute Sacrifice and as our Great High Priest) entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal **redemption** (lutrosis - ransoming and release from penalty, power and ultimately some day from the presence and pleasure of sin) (see note Hebrews 9:12).

And for this reason He (Jesus Christ our Great High Priest) is the Mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the **redemption** (apolutrosis - payment of a price to ransom and emancipate slaves of sin) of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (see note Hebrews 9:15).

We see a parallel teaching by **Jesus** Who describes

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, **be merciful** to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted." ([Lu 18:10-14](#))

The verb for **be merciful** is **hilaskomai**, which is of the same word group as hilasterion and means to make reconciliation for, be

propitious, be gracious or be favorably inclined. The idea in this verb is to show compassion and concern for someone in difficulty despite that person having committed a moral offense.

**Vine** adds that **hilaskomai** "was used amongst the Greeks with the significance to make the gods propitious, to appease, propitiate, inasmuch as their good will was not conceived as their natural attitude, but something to be earned first. This use of the word is foreign to the Greek Bible, with respect to God, whether in the Sept. or in the N. T. It is never used of any act whereby man brings God into a favorable attitude or gracious disposition. It is God who is propitiated by the vindication of His holy and righteous character, whereby, through the provision He has made in the vicarious and expiatory sacrifice of Christ, He has so dealt with sin that He can shew mercy to the believing sinner in the removal of his guilt and the remission of his sins. ([Vine, W E: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. 1996. Nelson](#))

Hugh Stowell caught a vision of the sublime privilege we have to come before the **mercy seat** and find comfort in time of need. In 1828, he penned the words to a hymn that he originally entitled **Peace at the Mercy Seat**, but the title was later changed to...

### **From Every Stormy Wind**

From every stormy wind that blows,  
From every swelling tide of woes,  
There is a calm, a sure retreat:  
**'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.**

There is a place where Jesus sheds  
The oil of gladness on our heads;  
A place than all besides more sweet:  
**It is the blood-bought mercy seat.**

There is a scene where spirits blend,  
Where friend holds fellowship with friend;  
Though sundered far, by faith they meet  
**Around one common mercy seat.**

There, there, on eagles' wings we soar,  
And time and sense seem all no more;  
And heaven comes down, our souls to greet,  
**And glory crowns the mercy seat.**

Oh, let my hand forget her skill,  
My tongue be silent, cold, and still,  
This bounding heart forget to beat,  
**If I forget the mercy seat!**

**Ray Pritchard** says that

To **propitiate** means to "turn away wrath by offering a gift." Pagan religions are built on the concept of propitiation, whereby a devotee brings a chicken, a goat, a lamb, or a plate of food and offers it to his god. I saw that very thing happen in Haiti and also in India. By bringing the blood of a chicken, the followers of voodoo hope to appease the evil spirits and turn away their wrath. On a completely different level, a husband does this after having a fight with his wife when he stops at the freeway off ramp and buys flowers on the way home. He hopes the offering of flowers will turn away wrath and restore a right relationship. In the Old Testament the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year—on the Day of Atonement—bringing with him the blood of a bull. When he sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat—the lid of the Ark of the Covenant—that blood was accepted by God as an "atonement" or a "covering" for the sin of the people.

The New Testament picks up this idea of **propitiation** in [1 John 2:2](#).

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

The phrase "atoning sacrifice" translates the normal Greek word of propitiation. By the offering of himself, Jesus turned away God's wrath forever. Let me give you three truths to summarize the effects of **propitiation**:

(1) Because Jesus Christ died, God's justice is now satisfied.

(2) Because Jesus Christ died, God's wrath has now been turned away. The price for sin has been paid.

(3) Because Jesus Christ died, God's mercy is now freely available to anyone who wants it. Justice satisfied ... the price paid ... mercy available. What an awesome thought. God's wrath is real, but so is his mercy. He satisfied His Own wrath by offering his own Son on the cross. "Amazing love, how can it be, that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" ([A Forgotten Doctrine: The Wrath of God](#))

It was between the wings of those angels, on the mercy seat, that God met Moses (Ex 25:22) but for all practical purposes, the average man (and most Jews were "average" in sense that only one could be High Priest) had no access to God. The regular priests could not get nearer than the outer sanctuary, and the ordinary person no closer than the outer court.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the mercy seat. Only on the basis of the blood of a goat would God have fellowship with Israel, and only on the basis of the blood of Christ will God be propitiated (His righteous wrath against sin satisfied) have fellowship with men.

#### Related Resources:

- [The Tabernacle: A Picture of Jesus \(Exodus 25-30\)](#)
- [The Tabernacle of Moses – God's Heavenly Pattern for our Spiritual Transformation - Part I: The Outer Court](#) - excellent graphics
- [The Tabernacle of Moses – God's Heavenly Pattern for our Spiritual Transformation - Part II: The Holy Place](#)
- [The Tabernacle of Moses – God's Heavenly Pattern for our Spiritual Transformation - Part III: The Holy Place](#)
- [The Tabernacle of Moses – God's Heavenly Pattern for our Spiritual Transformation - Part IV: The Holy Place](#)
- [The Tabernacle of Moses – God's Heavenly Pattern for our Spiritual Transformation - Part V: The Most Holy Place](#)
- [The Tabernacle, the Dwelling Place of God](#)
- [What was the tabernacle of Moses?](#)
- [What was the tent of meeting?](#)
- [What was the significance of the bronze laver?](#)
- [What is the mercy seat?](#)
- [What is the Shekinah glory?](#)

**BUT OF THESE THINGS WE CANNOT NOW SPEAK IN DETAIL: peri on ouk estin (3SPAI) nun legein (PAN) kata meros**

- [Hebrews 9 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### But - term of contrast

**Spurgeon** comments that "Because it was not his main purpose at that time, and he was writing an important Epistle upon the most vital truths, it would not do to encumber it with too many explanations, so he waived the explanation of those things for another time."

**Cannot speak in detail** - Not because he was ignorant, but because he did not wish to detract from his main point, the better sacrifice, better than that which the Levitical priests offered in the Sanctuary.

**Kata meros** is an idiom, which literally means "*in accordance with a part*" or pertaining to an activity which proceeds part by part and thus conveys the idea of describing in detail or speaking of one item after another. Many spiritual truths lay hidden like treasure in the Tabernacle and the Tabernacle furnishings, and all are suitable for our edification or building up. But now the writer is trying to draw the Hebrew professing believers not back to the treasures of the Old Covenant but to explain that they were always intended to be a symbol of the better things to come.

Everything about the [tabernacle](#) and its furnishings was meant to be a teaching tool and I like many conservative commentators, believe that ultimately every aspect of the Tabernacles pointed to and was fulfilled in Christ!

- Tabernacle (And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us);
- Lampstand (light of the world);
- Showbread (I am the bread of life);
- Veil (which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh);
- Mercy seat (redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation);
- Manna (I am the bread of life);
- Aaron's rod (Jesus the High Priest);
- Tablets/stone (perfectly fulfilled)

**Hebrews 9:1-14**  
**God's Remedy for Guilt**  
**Steven Cole**

Our society has thrown out guilt as a bad carryover from our Puritan past. Movie stars and celebrities not only cast off their guilt, but also go on TV to boast about their shameful deeds. Even Christians who have fallen into sin explain how they have come to feel good about themselves in spite of their failures. They complain about self-righteous, judgmental Christians who won't accept their "shortcomings."

And yet, in spite of our widespread efforts to suppress or deny guilt, we can't quite shake it. Years ago, psychologist Eric Fromm observed, "It is indeed amazing that in as fundamentally irreligious a culture as ours, the sense of guilt should be so widespread and deep-rooted as it is" (The Sane Society, [publisher unknown], p. 181). A cartoon hit the nail on the head. It showed a psychologist saying to his patient, "Mr. Figby, I think I can explain your feelings of guilt. You're guilty!"

The Bible declares that all of us are guilty before the bench of God's holy justice. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The Bible teaches that guilt is more than just a bad feeling. It is true moral culpability that alienates us from God and brings us under His decreed penalty, eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). But, thankfully, the Bible also declares that God has provided a remedy for our guilt. It is vital that we understand and apply this remedy personally.

The Hebrew Christians were tempted to leave the Christian faith and return to Judaism. The author is showing them why that would be spiritually fatal. The old covenant under Moses was inferior to the new covenant that Jesus initiated. The Levitical priests under the old covenant were sinful, mortal men, as contrasted with Jesus, our sinless priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. In our text, he shows that the old covenant sacrificial system was temporary and imperfect. It could not provide a clean conscience for the worshipers. God designed that old system to point ahead to the superior, final sacrifice of our high priest, Christ, who offered His own blood to obtain for us eternal redemption and a clean conscience. Thus his point is that...

God's remedy for guilt is the blood of Christ.

We will examine the text under three points: the imperfection of the old sacrificial system (9:1-10); what Christ's sacrifice of Himself accomplished (9:11-14); and, the practical result, that we now can serve the living God (9:14).

1. God designed the old sacrificial system as a temporary, imperfect way of pointing ahead to Christ (9:1-10).

These verses fall into two sections:

**A. GOD DESIGNED THE EARTHLY TABERNACLE AS A PICTURE OF CHRIST (9:1-5).**

John MacArthur (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews [Moody Press], p. 221) points out that the Bible only devotes two chapters to the story of creation, but it gives about 50 chapters to the tabernacle. It was the center of Jewish worship under the old covenant. The author mentions the tabernacle rather than the temple because the tabernacle was introduced immediately after the old covenant was instituted (Exod. 24-25). Also, the tabernacle was obviously more temporary than the temple, which fits the author's point here. As we saw in 8:5, the design of the tabernacle and its worship was not left up to human ideas, but God revealed everything in great detail to Moses on the mountain. The whole thing was an Old Testament portrait of Jesus Christ.

The author omits any reference to the courtyard, which contained the bronze altar for sacrifices and the bronze laver or basin. His purpose centers on the tabernacle itself, because he wants to compare and contrast it with the true tabernacle in heaven, where Jesus entered into the very presence of God.

The tabernacle was divided into two sections. The outer section, called the holy place, was about 30 long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high. The inner section, the Holy of Holies, was a 15-foot cube. On the left in the holy place, as the priest entered, was a solid gold lampstand with seven branches filled with pure olive oil. Since there were no windows, this provided the only source of light. On the right was the table that held the 12 loaves of sacred bread. Farther in, and to the center just outside the veil that divided the holy place from the Holy of Holies, was the altar of incense.

Scholars debate why the author of Hebrews seems to place the altar of incense inside the Holy of Holies, rather than just outside in the holy place. Some say that he was mistaken, but this is absurd. Every Jew knew the arrangement of these basic pieces of furniture. Some say that the reference is not to the altar itself, but to the censers that the priests used to carry incense into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, which the author obviously has in mind. The Greek word is used in this sense in the LXX. But then the author would have omitted mentioning a major piece of furniture in the holy place.

Probably the best solution is that the author is connecting the liturgical function of the altar of incense with its close association with the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (see Exod. 30:6; 40:5; 1 Kings 6:22). The same close connection is portrayed in Revelation 8:3, where the golden altar of incense, representing the prayers of the saints, is “before the throne.”

Inside the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant, measuring about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide and 27 inches high, which contained (in earliest times) a golden jar of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. The covering of the ark was called the mercy seat, or (in Greek), the place of propitiation. It was overshadowed by two cherubim of glory, so called because it was there that the glory of God’s presence was manifested (Exod. 25:22). The high priest sprinkled the blood from the sacrifices on this mercy seat.

The author does not explain the symbolic meaning of any of these things, but hurries on to his point, that these things were temporary and looked ahead to Christ. But let me comment briefly. The lampstand pictures Christ, not here as the light of the world (because the world was not allowed into the holy place), but as the one who illumines the things of God through the Holy Spirit (the oil) to those who draw near. The table of sacred bread pictures Christ as the sustenance of His chosen people and their communion with Him. The altar of incense shows Christ interceding for His people in God’s presence.

The ark pictured the very presence of God. The golden jar of manna shows Christ as the daily bread of His people. Aaron’s rod that budded shows Christ, the branch, chosen above others because He alone is life-giving. The tables of the covenant reveal God’s holy standards. Neither the pot of manna nor Aaron’s rod existed in Solomon’s time, but the two stone tables were still there (1 Kings 8:9). The ark itself apparently disappeared when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. The later temple only contained a stone slab in the Holy of Holies.

The author moves on to describe the familiar tabernacle ritual:

#### B. GOD DESIGNED THE MINISTRY OF THE PRIESTS IN THE TABERNACLE AS A PICTURE OF THE WORK OF CHRIST (9:6-10).

He summarizes the common activities of the priests in 9:6. They went into the outer tabernacle to trim the lamps and to put fresh incense on the altar. Once a week they would replace the sacred loaves of bread.

But 9:7 focuses on the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could go in there, once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). He would first offer a bull for his own sins. He would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of the bull on the mercy seat and in front of it. Then he would go back out and slaughter one of two goats as a sin offering for the people and take this blood into the mercy seat. He would go back out and lay his hands on the living goat, confessing over it the sins of the people. They would lead this goat out into the wilderness and let it go.

The author calls attention to the fact that old system provided a way for forgiveness for “the sins of the people committed in ignorance” (9:7). The Law stipulated that there was no sacrifice for sins of defiance (Num. 15:30-31). There is a sense, of course, in which virtually all of our sins stem from defiance toward God, but the reference in Numbers seems to refer to outrageous, blasphemous behavior that represented revolt or treason against God (Ronald Allen, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Zondervan], ed. by Frank Gaebeline, 2:830). In this sense, there is a parallel in Hebrews 10:26-31, where the author strongly warns his readers against apostasy, for which there is no sacrifice.

The annual Day of Atonement ritual would have underscored to Israel a number of vital spiritual truths. It portrayed the absolute holiness of God and how our sin separates us from entering His presence. It showed the sin and defilement of all of the people, including the high priest. It showed that no one dared to enter God’s holy presence without the blood of an acceptable sacrifice. It showed that the people must approach God through the proper mediator, the high priest. It showed that if the proper sacrifice was offered, God would be propitiated or satisfied, so that He would not judge their sins. But, as glorious as all of this ritual was, it was inadequate, for two main reasons:

##### 1). THE OLD SYSTEM PROVIDED LIMITED ACCESS TO GOD.

None of the people and not even all of the priests could enter the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could go there, and that only once a year, with blood. It was not a cozy place where he put his feet up on the hearth and had a warm conversation with God! He had to make sure that he had the ritual down perfectly, or it would be his last trip into that sacred sanctuary!

The author attributes the Old Testament account to the Holy Spirit (9:8), who was signifying “that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the first tabernacle is still standing.” Some understand “first tabernacle” to refer to the entire tabernacle, but since the same phrase is used in 9:2 & 6 to refer to the holy place, others take it to refer to the outer or first room of the tabernacle. The meaning then would be that the holy place “was blocking the way into the sanctuary of God’s presence for the mass of the people, for whom entry even into the holy place was prohibited.... So long, then, as the holy place continued standing they had no

hope of immediate access to God" (Philip Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [Eerdmans], p. 322, 323).

## 2). THE OLD SYSTEM PROVIDED LIMITED EFFICACY OF THE SACRIFICES.

The author's bottom line is that these gifts and sacrifices could not "make the worshiper perfect in conscience" (9:9). He does not explain exactly what that means, except that it was "a symbol" (parable) "for the present time." The "present time" (9:9) may mean "the time then present," that is, "in the Old Testament days the way to God was not yet revealed." Or, it may mean "the time now present," indicating that "the real meaning of the tabernacle can only now be understood, in the light of the work of Christ" (Leon Morris, The Expositor's Bible Commentary [Zondervan], ed. by Frank Gaebelein, 12:84).

The inability of the sacrifices to make the worshiper perfect in conscience "did not mean ... that no Old Testament saint ever had a clear conscience, but he did not obtain it by the sacrifices as such" (ibid.). The author offers two reasons for this statement (9:10). First, they were external regulations for the body, but (the implication is) they could not deal adequately with the conscience. Second, they were temporary, "imposed until a time of reformation," which refers to the time of Christ. The fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated annually showed the incomplete nature of the forgiveness. It put off guilt for each year, but it had to be done again and again.

Up to this point, the author is arguing that the Old Testament sacrificial system was not God's complete and final provision for the guilt of our sins. It all pointed ahead to Christ.

### 2. The blood of Christ obtained eternal redemption and a clean conscience for us (9:11-14).

Whereas the old system provided only limited access and limited efficacy, Christ provides complete access and efficacy:

#### A. CHRIST'S BLOOD PROVIDES COMPLETE ACCESS INTO THE HEAVENLY HOLY OF HOLIES (9:11-12).

There is a textual variant in 9:11. Probably the best reading is, "the good things that have come." The "greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands," refers to the "true tabernacle" in heaven (8:2), which is God's very presence. The point is, Christ didn't just go into an earthly Holy of Holies. He went into heaven itself, of which the earthly tabernacle was only a picture.

Furthermore, Christ didn't take the blood of goats and calves to sprinkle on the altar. Rather, He went there "through His own blood." Some have erroneously taught that Jesus had to carry His blood into heaven to secure our redemption. But He didn't go there with His blood, but through His blood. He secured our redemption on the cross. In contrast to going back every year, Christ "entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." The author is showing the complete supremacy and finality of the blood of Christ over the old system. Through His death, our guilt is atoned for once and for all, for all eternity! The penalty has been paid. There is nothing that we can add to what Christ did. Through Him we have direct access to God!

#### B. CHRIST'S BLOOD PROVIDES COMPLETE EFFICACY THAT CLEANSSES OUR CONSCIENCES (9:13-14).

The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer "sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh." In addition to the Day of Atonement ritual, the author adds the red heifer ritual (Num. 19:1-13). This was a ritual for purification, especially if someone had been defiled by touching a dead body. The author argues from the lesser to the greater. If these rituals could cleanse the flesh, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Jesus Christ is the only one who could atone for man's sin, because He alone was a man without blemish in all that He did. Thus His blood can act as the substitute for the penalty that we deserve.

Scholars debate whether "eternal Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus' eternal divine spirit (there were no capital letters in the original Greek). We cannot be dogmatic on this. If it refers to the Holy Spirit, then it means that Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit when He went to the cross, which is certainly true. If it refers to Jesus' eternal divine nature, the emphasis would be on the fact that Jesus' sacrifice was uniquely efficacious to redeem His people, because He is not only a man, but also is eternal God (7:3, 16). The point is, "the difference between the levitical offerings and Christ's self-offering was infinite rather than relative" (P. Hughes, p. 360). This infinitely efficacious sacrifice satisfied God in a way that the blood of bulls and goats never could. Through Christ's blood, we can have a clean conscience.

The Bible teaches that the conscience alone is not an infallible guide. Through repeated sin, the conscience can be defiled (Titus 1:15) and seared (1 Tim. 4:2). For example, I read that Cambodian dictator Pol Pot murdered between two and seven million of his fellow people. He ordered the murder of everyone who wore eyeglasses, among many other senseless killings. Historians say that his evil deeds were even greater than those of Hitler and Stalin, if possible. Yet just before he died in 1998, he told a reporter that he had a clear conscience! It wasn't clear; it was seared!

So our consciences need to be informed and trained through Scripture. As we learn who God is and what His holy standards are, our consciences accuse us of how sinful we are. God's commandments, applied as Jesus did to the heart level, convict and

condemn us all! None of us come close to loving God with our entire being, or to loving our fellow human beings as we love ourselves. Part of God's work in regeneration is to bring His holy Law to bear on our hearts, so that we despair of any way of trying to justify ourselves. We stand truly guilty

So how can our guilt be removed and our consciences be cleansed? Only through the sacrifice of an acceptable substitute. As 1 Peter 3: 18 puts it, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...." Or, as Paul put it (Rom. 3:24-25), "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." Our guilt is not removed by doing penance or good works. Our guilt is totally removed by God's free gift through the blood of Christ. We receive this gift through faith.

"But," you may wonder, "if it is totally by God's grace apart from anything that we do, won't people take advantage of His grace by living in sin?" Paul deals extensively with this objection in Romans 6. But here our author counters it with a single phrase at the end of verse 14:

3. Christ redeems and cleanses us from dead works to serve the living God (9:14).

Some Christians serve God in an attempt to pacify a guilty conscience. They erroneously think, "If I do enough for Him, maybe He will forgive me." That is a wrong motive! Others mistakenly think that God forgives them so that they can feel good. Their focus is on themselves, not on God and others. Again, that is a wrong focus. The proper order is, "God has forgiven me by His grace through the precious blood of His Son. Now I am free to serve Him!"

There are three senses in which the works of those who have not trusted in the blood of Christ are dead works (from P. Hughes, pp. 360-361): First, they are dead works because the one doing them is dead in his sins, separated from the life of God. Second, they are dead works because they "are essentially sterile and unproductive." They cannot communicate spiritual life to others because they stem from a person who is spiritually dead. Third, they are dead works because they end in spiritual death. A person does them thinking that they will earn him eternal life. But if eternal life could come through our good works, then Christ died needlessly! No amount of good works can qualify a person for heaven.

But once we are born again by God's grace, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2), so that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do it to God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Our daily lives become an act of worship and praise to the living God out of gratitude (Heb. 13:15-16).

## Conclusion

Charles Simeon was a godly Anglican pastor at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge. He described his own conversion in 1813 (F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [Eerdmans], p. 194, citing H. C. G. Moule, Charles Simeon):

As I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect—"That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, "What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer." Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.

Have you done that? If you have not, you are truly guilty before God and stand in jeopardy of His judgment. If you have, you have applied God's remedy for your guilt, the blood of Christ. With a clean conscience, you now can serve the living God.

## Discussion Questions

- Are guilt feelings valid for a Christian who has sinned? How would you counsel such a person?
- How can a believer distinguish between true and false guilt? How should each be dealt with?
- How should we witness to a person who has no sense of guilt before God?
- If we are totally forgiven through faith in Christ, why do we need to ask forgiveness when we sin?
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