

Hebrews 9A (2014)

- When high school students are preparing to apply to college, they all experience a rite of passage called standardized testing
 - The SAT or ACT tests are well-known to every high school student
 - And on these tests, you will find one particular kind of question that many students really dislike: the analogy question
 - For example: medicine is to illness as education is to an Aggie
 - Well, the writer of Hebrews is in the middle of his own analogy of sorts
 - He is comparing the Old Covenant with the New in all its key components
 - In each comparison, the writer is making an analogy
 - And in each analogy, the point is always the same: the New beats the Old hands down
 - In fact, the writer shows in each case that New is the better covenant
 - And since the New is always a better covenant by God's design, it was always intended to replace the Old
 - The Old was never anything more than a placeholder in God's plan
 - It served a temporary purpose until the New arrived
- In Chapters 7-8, the writer set up this analogy using the Priesthood of Jesus as his starting point
 - Since Jesus wasn't qualified to be an Aaronic priest, He can't be serving the Father under the terms of the Old Covenant
 - Therefore, Jesus must be a Priest of a different order
 - And He must be serving the Father under a different Law or covenant
 - The writer then proceeded to show us that Jesus was a Priest under the order of Melchizedek

- That's an order that predated (or existed before) the Levitical priesthood of the Law
 - As the appearance of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 proved
- And it is Jesus' priesthood that is superior to the Levitical priesthood
 - As Psalm 95 proved
- So we could say that as Levi is to the Covenant of Law, so is Jesus is to the Covenant of Grace
 - There was a New and better covenant planned for God's people
 - And when God was ready to reveal that better covenant, the Old Covenant was intended to disappear
 - The writer ended Chapter 8 with that very claim

Heb. 8:13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

- Now in Chapters 9-10, the writer will explore two more analogies
 - First, in Chapter 9 the writer examines the place of worship, which is the tabernacle (or temple), which is the center of Jewish religious observance
 - That building was the product of the Old Covenant and the Law it delivered
 - It was in the Law itself that God stipulated that the people build a tabernacle where God's glory would dwell among the people
 - So if a New Covenant has arrived, what are we to make of that building in God's plan for His people?
 - Then in Chapter 10, the writer examines the activities that took place inside that building, namely the sacrificial system itself
 - Under the Old Covenant Law, Israel was commanded to perform certain sacrifices regularly in the tabernacle/temple
 - So the writer will show through analogy how those rituals are replaced with better things in the New Covenant

- In all these discussions, the writer is working very patiently to explain that the things of the Old haven't been thrown away or dismissed senselessly
 - In fact, they aren't being thrown away at all
 - They are being replaced
 - We still have need for a priest
 - We still have need for a house where God will dwell
 - Men still have need for atoning sacrifice
 - And by analogy, the writer is going to show that those needs are served in a better way by the New Covenant than by the old
- Looking at the first verse of Chapter 9, we clearly see the writer outlining these intentions over the next two chapters

Heb. 9:1 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

- We can see him introducing his analogy when he begins to compare the Old Covenant to the New in the areas of regulation for worship and the earthly sanctuary
 - Those two areas are the topics for Chapters 9 and 10
 - Interestingly, the writer addresses the two topics in reverse order to the order he introduces them in v.1
 - He will explain his analogy of the tabernacle first in Chapter 9
 - And he will move to an analogy of the regulations for worship (that is, the sacrificial system) in Chapter 10
- I'm going to cover these two chapters a little differently than my usual approach
 - By that I mean, I am not going to spend a lot of time examining the details of the tabernacle and its construction, or the sacrificial system, as it was practiced under the Law
 - The writer himself will summarize those things for us
 - If you want to dive into the details of those topics, I point you the VBVM Exodus study online

- Instead, I want to focus on the writer's larger point, which is how and why these things were replaced by the New Covenant
 - His purpose in writing to the Church is to teach us concerning the New Covenant and its superiority, so that's where I want to focus as well
 - And to understand how the New operates, we first need to understand the purpose God had in giving the Old in the first place
- So let's begin with that brief background: how did the Old arrive and why?
 - First, the Bible teaches that the Old Covenant was established between God and a certain nation of people: Israel
 - We find the Law and all that it established in the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy
 - But most of it is found in Exodus and Leviticus
 - The Covenant was a generational agreement, meaning it bound not just one generation of Israel, but every generation of Israel
 - God declared in Deut. 29 that everyone in Israel will be held accountable to this Covenant
 - Not just those who stood at the mountain with Moses
 - But all generations of Israel that would come later throughout history
 - And it was not given to the Gentiles
 - Furthermore, the Old Covenant is a conditional covenant, or a parity covenant
 - It spelled out certain blessings God would bring Israel
 - But, those blessings were contingent on Israel's performing up to the standards of the Covenant
 - Specifically, all Israel was required to keep the Law perfectly forever in order to receive the blessings of that Covenant
 - If they failed to meet this standard, Israel would instead receive the curses of the Covenant

- Over the course of many centuries, Israel drifted away from practicing the Law as God intended
 - Increasingly, the nation became corrupted by the surrounding nations and by their evil kings
 - They distorted and perverted the rituals God gave them
 - So eventually, the Lord judged the nation for their failure to follow the Covenant, just as He promised in the Law
- God knew Israel would fail in keeping the Law, since no sinful man can keep God's Law perfectly
 - So in the Law itself, God also provided a sacrificial system for Israel to follow
 - By following the sacrificial system, Israel could continue in the Lord's blessings, despite their inability to keep the Law
 - By performing the sacrificial rituals, the nation maintained good standing in the Old Covenant
 - But the sacrificial system was not intended to address eternal life for an individual Jew
 - Under the Old Covenant, and individual's salvation came just as it comes for us today
 - The Jew had to believe in God's promised provision of a Messiah
 - And by their individual faith, they were saved
 - Meanwhile, the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant made it possible for the nation to continue in the blessings of the Old Covenant, despite their sin
 - We'll come back to this discussion in Chapter 10, when we look at the sacrificial system
- So after that very brief summary of the purposes of the Law, let's look at the writer's first analogy, between the tabernacle of the Old Covenant and the Heavenly tabernacle of the New Covenant

[Heb. 9:2](#) For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.

[Heb. 9:3](#) Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, [Heb. 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;

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

[Heb. 9:6](#) Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship,

[Heb. 9:7](#) but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

- We're in the first part of the analogy, where the writer is explaining the practices of the Old Covenant
 - And specifically, notice what the writer is emphasizing
 - He's focused on the design of the tabernacle as a series of chambers or rooms
 - The room with the most glory and beauty and significance was the innermost chamber
 - It's called the Holy of Holies, and it contained the Ark of Covenant
 - More importantly, it was the only place within the tabernacle where the glory of God was visible
 - But that room was closed off by a veil, so that no one could actually enter and see this wonderful place
 - Except for a high priest
 - That man could enter, but no one else in Israel could enter
 - But that high priest could only enter once per year, on the Day of Atonement, as prescribed in the Law
 - And even when he did enter, he must first perform a sacrifice for Himself, since he also was a sinful person
 - And then outside the Holy of Holies was another chamber, where only the Levitical priests could enter

- In this chamber, called the Holy Place, the priests served by offering daily sacrifices
 - These sacrifices were required by the Law on account of the sins of the people
 - It was by these daily sacrifices that the nation could remain in the Covenant of Law, despite their inability to keep the Law's regulations
- Furthermore, the two chambers were decorated with very unique and specific furnishings
 - There was an oil lamp, a table with bread, an altar where incense was burned, and of course the Ark with the mercy seat
 - These objects were something to behold
 - But so few people ever had the chance to see them in all their glory
 - Because unless you were a high priest, you never saw any of them
 - And unless you were the high priest of Israel, you could never see the Ark and mercy seat with God's glory resting upon it
 - All these rules and restrictions were set up by the Law and the Old Covenant that established it
 - And the writer lists these details as the first half of his analogy
 - He wants us to understand that this pattern was given to Israel to tell a story
 - That story was about Christ and the work He would do as a High Priest in a new and better covenant
- So now the writer turns to the second half of the analogy to explain why these things were given and what they meant

[Heb. 9:8](#) The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, **[Heb. 9:9](#)** which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, **[Heb. 9:10](#)** since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

[Heb. 9:11](#) But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;

[Heb. 9:12](#) and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

[Heb. 9:13](#) For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,

[Heb. 9:14](#) 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?

- We know the writer has moved to explaining the analogy, because he says the Holy Spirit was signifying something in all that was given to Israel
 - In other words, when Moses relayed the instructions of the tabernacle to the nation of Israel, he was relaying things given by the Spirit of God
 - This is further evidence that all Scripture is inspired and intended by God to teach us important things
 - For example, while we know that we are no longer under the Law, nevertheless the Law is still useful as instruction
 - In studying it, we learn about God's plan for Israel and the way the Law pictured Christ's fulfillment of that plan
 - So what was the Holy Spirit teaching us about the Old vs. New Covenants?
 - First, the writer says the multiple chambers and all the barriers to accessing the glory of God was a sign that the way to God had not yet been revealed
 - For as long as the tabernacle stood in keeping with the Lord's purposes, it was like a billboard
 - It was telling Israel your sin is a barrier to accessing God
 - And the solution to sin has not yet been given by God
 - So the tabernacle stood like a sign declaring "continue waiting..."
 - The solution Israel was waiting for was the Messiah, of course
 - And the New Covenant that the Messiah brings

- And even the design of the tabernacle service itself reinforced the idea that the solution to sin was still yet to be revealed
- And until the Messiah arrived, they were blocked off from God
- In vs.9-10, the writer highlights the way sacrifice was carried out in the tabernacle to prove his point
 - He says all the sacrifices and washings and other rituals prescribed under Law couldn't cleanse the worshipper's conscience
 - A worshipper who participated in the sacrifices and washings required in the Law never experienced relief from the guilt of sin
 - Only in a temporary, limited way, could they experience some sense of resolution
 - But because they also knew that future sin would bring about the need for future sacrifice, they couldn't feel a truly clean
 - They still understood that their sin was a problem
 - Since it continued to form a barrier to God
 - The knowledge that the Law required continuing sacrifice served to remind them that they were not truly cleansed
 - Therefore, they knew that none of the sacrifices under the Law were actually solving the problem of sin
 - The washings, food restrictions and drink requirements only served to protect the physical body
 - They could not address the fundamental problem of our dead spirit
 - Therefore, something greater than the tabernacle and sacrifices of the Law was still required to reconcile men to God
 - The only way to know freedom from the guilt of sin is for God Himself to cleanse our conscience by assigning His righteousness to us
 - That's the difference between law and grace
 - By law, we are reminded continually that we have sin and we need atonement

- But by God's grace, we are made to be righteous, through Christ's sacrifice on our behalf
- So in vs.11-14, the writer finishes his analogy by describing the greater tabernacle of the New Covenant
 - That tabernacle, the writer says, is not found on earth
 - This tabernacle is one not built by human hands
 - That is to say, it was built by God
 - We learned earlier in the letter, that the earthly tabernacle is patterned after the Heavenly one
 - It is like a small scale model intended to teach us
 - In the case of the Law, the Aaronic high priest entered with a basin of blood taken from a bull
 - As he entered, he sprinkled it on the mercy seat over the Ark to atone for the sins of the nation of Israel
 - The writer seems to be suggesting that this ritual is patterned on the sacrifice Christ was to perform in the Heavenly tabernacle in His own blood
 - So that just as the high priest applied blood to the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, so did Jesus in His tabernacle
 - Remember the SAT analogies?
 - This suggests that Jesus went to the Heavenly tabernacle soon after His death to apply His own blood
 - Notice in v.12, the writer says Jesus entered by way of His own blood, not with the blood of bulls and goats
- But if Jesus did enter the Heavenly tabernacle and apply His own blood to the mercy seat, when did He accomplish this work?
 - Some believe that we get that answer in John's Gospel, after Jesus' resurrection
 - In Chapter 20, the resurrected Lord encounters Mary Magdalene
 - When she sees Jesus alive, she embraces Him

[John 20:16](#) Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

[John 20:17](#) Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

- This encounter happened on the day of Jesus' resurrection, and so perhaps, He was speaking of His ascension to apply His blood in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - If so, then this was an entirely different ascension than the one Jesus performed in Acts 1
 - That later ascension would have been to sit at the right hand of the Father
 - The significance of sitting indicates that work has been finished
- So like the SAT analogy, the work of the earthly high priest was a lesser example of the greater work Jesus intended to perform on our behalf in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - Jesus' atoning work was greater because the sacrifice He offered was infinitely better than the one offered by the Levitical high priest
 - The earthly priests were commanded to use the blood of bulls and goats in their sacrifices
 - But the blood of an animal is only sufficient to cleanse the body, the writer says in v.13
 - What he means is that an animal's sacrificial death was a payment for the sins under the Law, and so it permitted the restoration of a Jew who had violated the Law
 - A Jew who obeyed the Law and sacrificed an animal as God directed was permitted to remain a citizen in good standing within Israel
 - If a Jew failed to perform the required sacrifices, they were to be cut off from Israel, according to the Law
 - So the blood of these animals cleansed the flesh, in the sense that it permitted the physical restoration of a person
 - Just as today, a criminal is returned to society after paying his debt in prison, so was a Jew restored physically by the blood of a bull or goat

- But as the writer noted earlier, the person's conscience was not cleansed in this process
 - They might have satisfied the requirements of the Law through the sacrifice of a bull or goat, but that didn't address their debt before God
 - They were still sinful and therefore, they still awaited a solution from God
- So in v.14, the writer applies the analogy once more, saying if the blood of a bull or goat could restore earthly fellowship, then the blood of Christ Himself was the solution to reconciling us in fellowship with God
 - Christ's blood was capable of atoning for our sins once for all so that we might be called a friend of God
 - All our sins were covered by the blood of Christ, because His life possessed two unique qualities nothing else possessed
 - First, Jesus was a man, so He was a perfect substitute for those He died to save
 - The death of an animal isn't sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God against our sin, because they are not an equal substitute for us
 - Imagine if someone owed a debt to the bank
 - And then one day, they showed up to pay off the debt using Monopoly money
 - Obviously, the bank wouldn't accept Monopoly money to pay off the debt, because the person owed them real money
 - Only a payment with real money would satisfy the debt
 - Likewise, the debt we owe God for our sin is a human life
 - As Paul says in Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death
 - So the death of a bull or goat or lamb isn't capable of paying the debt we owe for our sin
 - Only a human life can substitute for our life
- Secondly, Jesus' blood has the power to atone for our sin, because His life was perfect and without sin

- Notice in v.14, the writer says Jesus offered Himself without blemish
 - He lived a sinless life, never committing even one sin
 - Jesus' willingness to resist the devil's temptations under extreme circumstances in the desert was evidence of His resolve to remain obedient to the Father
- Therefore, Jesus' death was undeserved and so it was available as a payment for you and I
 - Go back to our example of the bank debt again
 - What if a person walked into a bank to pay off a debt
 - But in this particular case, imagine this person had never taken out a loan at that bank in the first place
 - What would the bank do with his payment?
 - Assuming the bank kept the money, they could apply that payment to someone else's debt
- That's exactly what Christ's death did for you and for me
 - The payment Christ made in His own blood was a payment for a debt that Christ did not incur
 - Since He had no sin of His own, He had no debt to pay
 - And yet, He paid it nonetheless
 - So the Father is willing to apply that payment to the account of anyone who accepts Jesus' payment in their place
- So the writer says in v.14, that if we accept the payment of Jesus, His blood is capable of cleansing our conscience from dead works
 - Doing works to please God – whether works done under the Law of Moses or any other set of rules – cannot cleanse our conscience
 - Works cannot erase sin, and animal blood cannot pay our debt
 - So our conscience continues to feel the weight of condemnation
 - We know in our spirit that we remain in trouble with God
 - On the other hand, if we accept the payment of Christ on our behalf, we feel the weight of condemnation lifted

- Our sins are forgiven and we are freed to serve a living God
- As sin is to condemnation, so is Jesus Christ to eternal life