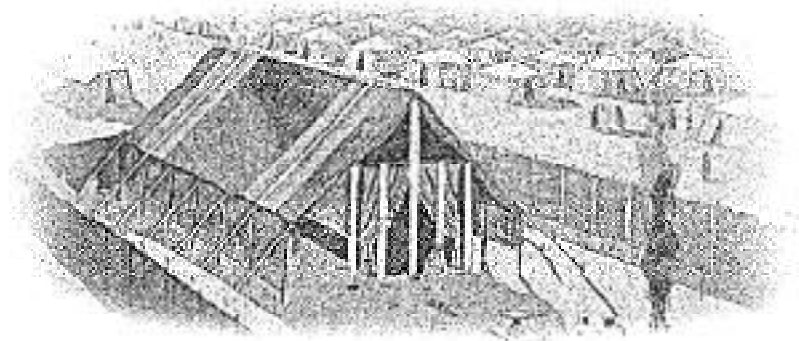


Sanctuary Language in Hebrews



READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 9.

MEMORY VERSE: “But Christ [Jesus] has already come as the High Priest of the good things that are already here. The tent in which he serves is greater and more perfect; it is not a man-made tent, that is, it is not a part of this created world” (Hebrews 9:11, TEV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: The book of Hebrews is full of sanctuary language that helps us understand what Jesus is doing for us in heaven.

IN DECEMBER 1989, MOODY MONTHLY¹ REPORTED that “two Talmudic (Jewish) schools near the Western (Wailing) Wall in Jerusalem are teaching students about the temple service. Other scholars (experts) are researching family histories to find men of the priestly line. Plans are being made for a convention of these men next year. Jewish members of the Temple Mount Faithful dedicated a three-ton ‘cornerstone’ two kilometers (1.2 miles) from the temple site. Police stopped them from finishing the ceremony in the Western Wall Plaza.”—Page 74; adapted.

Many hundreds of years ago, the sanctuary was destroyed. But the above article tells us that there is still interest in the sanctuary and its services. This week we will take a deeper look “inside the veil [curtain]” of the sanctuary in heaven. This sanctuary was made without hands. It is the sanctuary where Jesus now works as our great High Priest.

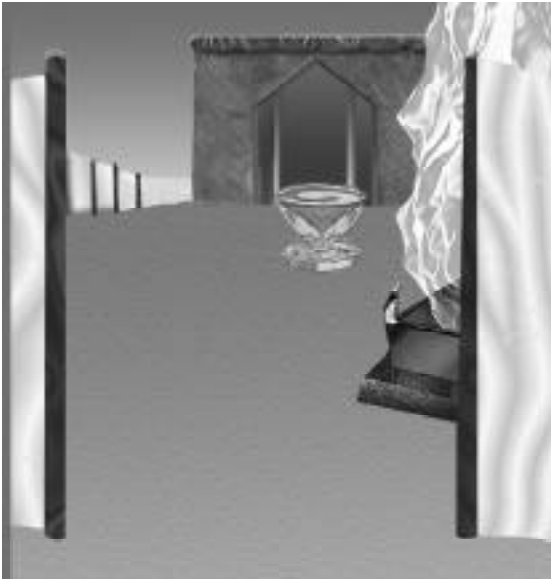
¹*Moody Monthly*—a Christian magazine.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: In Hebrews, what does the work of the earthly sanctuary accomplish? What can the work of the earthly sanctuary teach us about the work of the heavenly sanctuary? Does Hebrews teach that there is a real sanctuary in heaven? What is the purpose of Jesus' ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.

SUN THE SANCTUARY ON EARTH.

The book of Hebrews says clearly that Jesus is our High Priest in heaven. This idea of priesthood was not something that Paul's readers failed to know and understand. Paul builds his thoughts around the Old Testament sanctuary and the priesthood of that sanctuary. Without that background, much of what Paul says about Jesus and His work as High Priest in heaven does not make sense.



The Old Testament sanctuary.

What is Paul talking about in Hebrews 9:1-3? Why does Paul bring

this topic into the discussion of Jesus' high-priestly ministry (work)? Read also Exodus 25:8.

What else was Paul talking about? Hebrews 9:4, 5.

What is Paul describing in Hebrews 9:6, 7?

Paul gives a quick review of the old Hebrew sanctuary service on earth. He describes both rooms of the sanctuary and the daily and yearly services that took place in these rooms. Then, in Hebrews 9:8-14, Paul talks about how Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary to begin His high-priestly work.

Paul points out that what Jesus is doing in heaven is better and greater than what happened in the sanctuary on earth (Hebrews 9:11). But it is clear that the ministry in the earthly sanctuary is connected with the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. That is why Paul talks about the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary together. What happened in the earthly sanctuary helps us to better understand what is happening in the heavenly sanctuary.

Hebrews uses two words for the sanctuary, *hagion/hagia* and *skēnē*. *Hagion/hagia* means “holy.” In Hebrews, it translates “sanctuary,” “Holy Place,” and “Most Holy Place,” depending on the content.² *Skēnē* is “tent” or “tabernacle” and reminds us of the Old Testament tabernacle (tent) in the wilderness.

How well do you understand the earthly sanctuary service? We do not need to know all the details. But the book of Hebrews shows that the earthly sanctuary service is very important. Therefore, we should study the earthly sanctuary. Read the parts in Exodus and Leviticus that describe the building, the structure, and the service of the earthly sanctuary: Exodus 25–30; Exodus 35–40; Leviticus 1–7; Leviticus 16. These verses remind us that this whole system symbolized Jesus’ death and heavenly ministry (work) for sinners.

MON THE SANCTUARY IN HEAVEN.

“The whole point of what we are saying is that we have such a High Priest, who sits at the right of the throne of the Divine Majesty [God] in heaven. He serves as High Priest in the Most Holy Place, that is, in the real tent which was put up by the Lord, and not man” (Hebrews 8:1, 2, TEV).

²content—setting of a verse; what the verses before and after a verse mean will determine what that verse means.

Paul and his readers must have known the Old Testament and its sanctuary services very well. Paul speaks about the earthly sanctuary as introduced by God and built under Moses’ supervision (Exodus 25–31; Exodus 35–40). Later, Solomon built a temple. This temple was fancier than the sanctuary in the wilderness. The temple had ten golden lamp stands and ten tables. The sanctuary only had one lamp stand and one table (2 Chronicles 3–7).



Solomon’s temple.

What other parts of the earthly sanctuary service does Hebrews 9 describe?

Hebrews 9:9 _____

Hebrews 9:10 _____

Hebrews 9:21 _____

Hebrews 9 points to all the basic furniture of the earthly sanctuary. Hebrews 9 also talks about some of the services that were done in the earthly sanctuary, including different sacrifices and offerings. Paul does not explain too much about the things in the heavenly sanctuary. But he makes one point clear: He believes that a real sanctuary is in heaven and that Jesus is working there as our High Priest.

What does Paul say that shows his belief in the real heavenly sanctuary? Hebrews 8:1, 2.

Paul discusses the earthly sanctuary, its “gifts and sacrifices” (Hebrews 9:9), its “meat and drinks, and its diverse [different] washings [cleansings]” (Hebrews 9:10) as models and examples of the heavenly sanctuary. The whole point of Hebrews is to show the readers that there is something even better than the earthly sanctuary (Exodus 25:8-9). That something better is the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus ministers (works) as our High Priest.

TUE SACRIFICES.

Hebrews is clear that Jesus’ work as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary is real. But Paul also talks about sacrifices. If sacrifice was important to the earthly sanctuary service, then sacrifice is very important to the heavenly sanctuary.

Which animals does Hebrews list that were used as sacrifices? Hebrews 9:12, 13, 19; Hebrews 10:4.

Which types of sacrifices do the animals point to? Leviticus 1:5; Leviticus 4:3; Leviticus 16:3; Numbers 7:17.

Hebrews lists four different animals. The lamb, which is so important in Revelation (John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19), is not found in Hebrews.

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint names goats in Numbers 7:17 as “peace offerings.” A word for bull in Hebrews is found in Leviticus 1:6 as a “burnt offering.” In Leviticus 4:3, the bull is “sin offering.” The heifer, mentioned in Hebrews 9:13, is in Numbers 19 as a peace offering. There the ashes of the red heifer are used for cleansing. Bulls and goats were also used on the Day of Atonement³ (Leviticus 16).

The different animals were used as sacrifices to remind us of the different Old Testament sacrifices and the Day of Atonement.

But all these animal sacrifices were just symbols. They were not able to save sinners from sin (Hebrews 10:4). The shedding of blood was important, because the blood pointed to Jesus. Jesus alone brings about forgiveness and restores⁴ sinners to God.

³Day of Atonement—a yearly religious service in which the high priest did a special service in the earthly sanctuary that offered cleansing, forgiveness, and renewal for another year. This is the work Jesus does for us as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

⁴restores—makes something as it was in the beginning before sin.

Rivers of animal blood were spilled over the centuries⁵ in the Old Testament sanctuary. All this blood taught a lesson about the cost of sin. Only animals were killed. But the animals could never bring salvation. The death (blood) of Jesus is the only way to solve the sin problem. What does that tell us about the real cost of sin?

WED THE SANCTUARY SERVICES.

Read Hebrews 8:1-3 and Hebrews 9:5-7. Notice who is involved in the sanctuary service. Paul mentions cherubim (angels), priests, high priests, the minister in the sanctuary, and the mediator.⁶ The titles *priest* and *high priest* are for Jesus and the priests who come from Aaron. Jesus is the real Priest and High Priest. Jesus' ministry (work) alone can solve the sin problem. This again points to a key theme of Hebrews: Jesus and His ministry are greater than anyone and any work before Him.

The word *minister* (*leitourgos*) is used for the angels in Hebrews 1:7 and for Jesus, the Minister in the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus' ministry (*leitourgia*; Hebrews 8:6) is the real "liturgy" (service). The word *mediator* is found three times in Hebrews (Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:24). The Mediator is Jesus. Jesus is the only Mediator between God and humans.

The cherubim mentioned in Hebrews 9:5 are the two golden figures placed on the mercy seat⁷ in the earthly sanctuary. What do the cherubim symbolize? Read also Ezekiel 1:5-14, 22-26; Ezekiel 10:1, 4, 18-22; Revelation 4:6-8.



The angels above the mercy seat symbolize God's presence.

Cherubim are real beings (living things) (Genesis 3:24). They live in God's presence. They form the group that follows the King of the universe in His sanctuary.

"There can be no doubt that the cherubim are a special class of angels. The Bible does not say we are to worship cherubim. Therefore, they cannot have been gods. They appear everywhere in God's service. They are usually in God's presence. In poetic, symbolic language they are represented as carrying God,

⁵centuries—hundreds of years.

⁶mediator—a person who works to save or solve problems between people. In this case, Jesus is our Mediator working to save us and bring us back to God.

⁷mercy seat—the cover of the ark of the covenant (agreement). The Ten Commandments were in the ark of the covenant. We cannot obey the Ten Commandments on our own. So we need God's mercy (kindness we do not deserve) to cover us. The mercy seat symbolizes the good news of salvation.

or as guarding or protecting His throne.”—Adapted from *SDA Bible Dictionary* (revised edition), pp. 189, 190.

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

There is no question that angels are mentioned as being in the sanctuary. What exactly they do, we do not know. But when we learn more about what God is doing in the sanctuary, we will be better able to understand the work of angels. The word *angel* comes from a word that means “messenger.” Angels are closely involved in the work of the sanctuary. So they see Jesus’ work in the sanctuary. He does this work in saving humanity.⁸ The work of saving humanity influences all of the universe.

Think of the heavenly sanctuary and Jesus’ work there for us with the great controversy (war) in mind. In this war, questions about God’s character are being reviewed by all creation. How can the angels’ work in the heavenly sanctuary influence the answers to these questions?

THU THE PROBLEM AND HOW IT IS SOLVED.

What theme do the following verses share? Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 9:26; Hebrews 9:28; Hebrews 10:12; Hebrews 10:17; Hebrews 13:11, 12.

Adam and Eve’s sin completely changed life on earth with disease, death, and suffering. But the saddest change that Adam and Eve’s sin caused was the separation that occurred between God and His people. All the mean things we do to one another and to ourselves are because of that separation. This separation comes with results more terrible than the breaking of the umbilical cord in the womb. What Adam and Eve lost was physical, spiritual, and even eternal.⁹

So Jesus came to heal this eternal separation. He died and now ministers (works) in heaven as our High Priest.



Jesus came to heal the separation between us and God.

This is what Hebrews is about: God is healing the separation between heaven and earth. Hebrews reviews the whole plan of salvation. Hebrews begins with Jesus’ death on the cross and continues

⁸humanity—all the people of the world.

⁹eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

with His work in the heavenly sanctuary.

The Bible does not focus so much on the sin problem. The Bible focuses more on the solution to sin: forgiveness of sin, freedom from sin, and the power to overcome sin. A key theme in Hebrews is cleansing. God wants to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from sin, and make us holy. Forgiveness, cleansing, and being made holy are possible because of Jesus' greatness in His sacrifice, blood, and ministry (work) for our sake.

Read again the verses at the beginning of today's lesson. All these verses talk about sin. But they talk about the cure for sin too. What do these verses say about what Jesus has done with the sin problem? Write a paragraph showing the wonderful hope these verses have for us. In your paragraph, focus on the results of what Jesus has done.

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "Jesus was the Lamb slain (killed) from the foundation (beginning) of the world. To many people, the mystery has been why so many sacrificial offerings were required in the Old Testament. But the great truth that we all need to remember is this, 'without shedding of blood is no remission [forgiveness].' Every bleeding sacrifice symbolized 'the Lamb of God, which taketh [takes] away the sin of the world.' Jesus Himself started the Jewish sacrificial system of worship. In this system, symbols pointed to spiritual and heavenly things. Many people forgot the true meaning of these sacrifices. Many people forgot the great

truth that through Jesus alone there is forgiveness of sin. No matter how many sacrificial offerings there were, they could not take away sin."—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 932, 933.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Revelation 7:15 and Revelation 16:17 say clearly that God's throne is in the heavenly sanctuary. Hebrews mentions God's throne four times (Hebrews 1:8; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 8:1; Hebrews 12:2). When we read Hebrews 4:16 and Hebrews 8:2, we also get the idea that God's throne is in the sanctuary. This is supported by Old Testament verses such as Psalm 11:4 and Isaiah 6:1. The sanctuary is the center of God's government. Salvation, help, and judgment come from the sanctuary. The sanctuary is God's dwelling place. The Old Testament word for temple (hēkāl) is also translated "palace." The sanctuary is where God's throne is. How does this idea of God's throne being in the sanctuary help us understand Jesus' ministry (work) in heaven?
2. If someone asked you "Why is Jesus' ministry in heaven important?" how would you answer?

SUMMARY: Hebrews is rich when it comes to words about the sanctuary. The sanctuary idea is the foundation (basis) for understanding all of Hebrews. The sanctuary idea teaches us that God wants to be close to us and live among us. Through Jesus, we can reach God and find joy in the promise of salvation.