

XX. The Blood of Christ

October 2/3/4, 2018

Hebrews 9:11-22

Aim: To realize that blood atonement for sin is required by God, and that only the perfect blood of Christ can fully and completely forgive sin and secure eternal redemption for us.

A. The Sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:11-14)

Schreiner: The main point in 9:1-10:18 is that Christ's sacrifice is better than the sacrifices of the old covenant. In 9:1-10 the inadequacy of old covenant sacrifices come to the forefront. They don't usher people into God's presence, nor do they truly cleanse the conscience from guilt. The sacrifice of Christ is contrasted with the sacrifices of the old covenant in 9:11-14.

Phillips: The image of the blood of Jesus Christ is central to the message of Christianity. If there is one passage in the Bible that exalts the blood of Jesus Christ, it is this one. It shows why the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is not only necessary but also a source of great joy and power; it shows not a cruel and twisted heavenly tyrant, but a God of love who makes the most costly provision so that we can draw near to Him.

1. The Heavenly Tabernacle (9:11-12)

a) *The Priestly Service of Christ (9:11)*

(1) The Good Things (9:11a)

¹¹*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come...*

Schreiner: Jesus' priesthood signaled the realization, at least in part, of the good things to come.' In Christ the eschatological good things have dawned, but they are not yet complete until the arrival of the heavenly city. We have another indication that the old era has been superseded, and in Christ that which is better has commenced.

Phillips: As has been the case all through this epistle, the writer of Hebrews is interested in a comparison between Christianity and old covenant Israel. He has contrasted Jesus to Moses, Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron, the new covenant to the old covenant, and the heavenly tabernacle to the earthly tabernacle. All of these comparisons are summed up in the phrase 'the good things that have come,' as compared to the provisional and shadowy order of the earlier time.

(2) The Greater Tent (9:11b)

...then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)...

Schreiner: The earthly tabernacle was a picture of the heavenly tabernacle. The conception is both spatial and eschatological. The earthly tabernacle points to a 'greater and more perfect tabernacle.' That which is heavenly, then, is far better than what is earthly. For the tabernacle Jesus entered does not belong to this creation, for it is not made with hands. Strictly speaking, there isn't a tabernacle at all in the heavenly realm. The heavenly tabernacle becomes a vehicle for describing the indescribable, for depicting the presence of God.

Hebrews – Lesson 20

Bruce: The sanctuary in which He ministers is the true tabernacle of which the Mosaic shrine was but a material copy; it is a sanctuary not made with hands, nor belonging to the earthly creation. The ‘greater and more perfect tent’ through which He has passed to enter the heavenly holy of holies comprises ‘the heavens’ of 4:14, the counterpart of the outer compartment in the earthly sanctuary.

Phillips: Jesus Christ has brought in an entirely new order. Before was the time of shadows and types. But now that Christ has gone ‘through the greater and more perfect tent’—that is, into the tabernacle of heaven as our high priest—all the good things of the promised new order have been inaugurated. Verses 1-10 symbolized this new situation by comparing it to the tabernacle, with the curtain removed so that the holy of holies was laid bare to the sight of the priests in the outer room. Our access to God and the sending of the Holy Spirit are at the heart of this new order.

MacArthur: Christ, as heavenly High Priest, has an infinitely greater sanctuary in which to minister. The new sanctuary, however, is not made by men or on earth or of earthly materials. It is made by God, in heaven, and of heavenly materials. The new sanctuary, in fact, *is* heaven. Earth belongs to God, but heaven is His dwelling place, His throne, and His sanctuary (Acts 7:48-50; 17:24). Heaven is the ‘perfect tabernacle, not made with hands.’ Christ ministers for us in heaven, in the throne room of God at God’s right hand.

b) *The Powerful Blood of Christ (9:12)*

...¹²*he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption.*

Schreiner: The earthly tabernacle was entered with ‘the blood of goats and calves’ (cp. Ex. 29:10; Lev. 1:5; 3:12; 4:3, 23; 8:2; 16:3). Jesus, however, entered the heavenly tabernacle because of a sacrifice far more valuable than the blood of animals. He offered His own blood; He surrendered His own life in death for the sake of His people. Furthermore, He entered ‘the most holy place’ ‘once for all’ (*εφάπαξ, ephapax*). Jesus did not literally bring His blood into heaven. The blood stands for the giving up of His life which was offered as a sacrifice. Again the most holy place in the tabernacle points to the holiest place of all: the presence of God in the transcendent realm. Jesus did not repeatedly offer His blood to procure forgiveness of sins. After all, as a human being He could only die once. As a result of Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice, He secured ‘eternal redemption’ (*αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν, aiōnian lutrōsin*). The one sacrifice was an effective and definitive sacrifice, securing forgiveness of sins.

MacArthur: How does Christ minister in His heavenly sanctuary? What does He do as our eternal High Priest? He does three things, primarily. First, His service is in ‘His own blood,’ not that of sacrificial animals. The Sacrifices was the Sacrifice. Second, He made His sacrifice only ‘once,’ and that once was sufficient for ‘all’ people of all time. Third, He obtained permanent, ‘eternal redemption.’ He cleansed past, present, and future sins all in one act of redemption.

Bruce: There have been expositors who, pressing the analogy of the Day of Atonement beyond the limits observed by the author, have argued that the expiatory work of Christ was not completed on the cross—not completed, indeed, until He ascended from earth and made atonement for us in the heavenly holy of holies by the presentation of His efficacious blood. But while it was necessary under the old covenant for the sacrificial blood first to be shed in the court and then to be brought into the holy of holies, no such division of our Lord’s sacrifice into two phases is envisaged under the new covenant. When on the cross He offered up His life to God as a sacrifice for His people’s sin, He accomplished in reality what Aaron and His successors

Hebrews – Lesson 20

performed in type by the twofold act of slaying the victim and presenting its blood in the holy of holies.

2. The Purification by Blood (9:13-14)

a) *Purification of the Flesh (9:13)*

(1) Bulls and Goats (9:13a)

¹³*For if the blood of goats and bulls...*

Schreiner: The author argues from the lesser to the greater here (9:13-14), from the earthly to the heavenly. Blood from goats and bulls sprinkles ‘those who are ceremonially unclean’ (τούς κεκοινωμένους, *tous kekoīnōmenous*).

Bruce: The blood of slaughtered animals under the old order did possess a certain efficacy, but it was an outward efficacy for the removal of ceremonial pollution. ‘The blood of bulls and goats’ is a general term covering not only the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement but other sacrifices as well. The sin offerings presented on the Day of Atonement, or at any other time, had no effect on the consciences of those on whose behalf they were brought; they served merely in an external and symbolical manner to counteract the defilement of sin.

Phillips: The superiority of Christ’s shed blood is evident from a comparison with the blood shed under the law of the old covenant. The point is not to show the failure of the animal blood that was shed and applied under the old covenant, but how effective it was. ‘The blood of bulls and goats’ is a general expression pointing to the whole sacrificial system for dealing with sin.

(2) Red Heifer (9:13b)

...and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer...

Schreiner: In the same way the ashes of a heifer remove defilement. The ceremony regarding the heifer is explained in Numbers 19. The ashes remove impurity as a sin offering (Num. 19:9, 17) and also remove corpse impurity (Num. 19:12).

Bruce: Along with these offerings our author mentions ‘the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who have been defiled.’ This is a reference to a ritual prescribed in Numbers 19 for the removal of ceremonial impurity. A perfect red heifer, which had never borne the yoke, was to be slaughtered outside the camp of Israel in the presence of Eleazar the priest (representing his father Aaron, the high priest), who was then to sprinkle its blood seven times in front of the tabernacle. The body of the heifer was then to be completely incinerated; Eleazar was to throw cedar wood, hyssop (marjoram), and scarlet thread into the burning fire. When all was consumed, the ashes were to be gathered up and stored outside the camp to be used as occasion required for the preparation of ‘water for (the removal of) impurity.’ Anyone who contracted ceremonial defilement through touching or approaching a dead body was to be cleansed by being sprinkled with water containing some of the ashes of the heifer. Just how the blood of sacrificed animals or the ashes of the red heifer effected a ceremonial cleansing our author does not explain; it was sufficient for him, and no doubt for his readers, that the Old Testament ascribed this efficacy to them.

Phillips: The last phrase, ‘the ashes of a heifer,’ refers to a ritual described in Numbers 19 in which the ashes of a red heifer were mixed with water for the purification of those rendered unclean by contact with a dead body. Sin and death were the things that defiled; thus these

Hebrews – Lesson 20

sacrifices dealt with the two great problems that separated man from the holy and ever-living God.

(3) Purification (9:13c)

...sanctify for the purification of the flesh...

Schreiner: All these sacrifices, however, did not truly cleanse the inner person or the conscience. They cleansed the flesh or body of those who were defiled. They removed ceremonial uncleanness.

Phillips: These sacrifices provided a kind of solution to the problem. They did ‘sanctify’ those who were unclean so that they could be restored to fellowship with God and Israelite society. Yet there was also something that they were unable to do: ‘Gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper’ (9:9). The blood of bulls and goats succeeded in restoring the unclean to ceremonial cleanliness and therefore to the religious life of the nation. But there was a better blood to which they pointed, a blood that in its shedding would actually cleanse the inner man, and therefore restore people to real fellowship with the holy God.

Hughes: The limited efficacy of the old covenant could make people ceremonially clean as well as atone for sins of ignorance. For example, if an Israelite became ceremonially defiled by touching a dead body, the remedy was ready. All he had to do was go to a priest who had in his possession the ashes of a red heifer that had been ritually sacrificed and burned with a mixture of cedar, hyssop and scarlet wool. These ashes, mixed in water and ritually sprinkled on the defiled, would bring him external cleansing (cp. Num. 19:1-13).

MacArthur: If the Old Covenant, weak and imperfect as it was, served its purpose, how much better will Christ’s New Covenant, powerful and perfect, serve its purpose. The new not only has a better purpose, but accomplishes its purpose in a better way, a perfect way. The purpose of the old sacrifice was to symbolize, eternally, the ‘cleansing’ of sin. It accomplished this purpose. The purpose of the new sacrifice, however, was to cleanse actually, internally (where sin really exists). It accomplished its superior purpose in a superior way.

b) *Purification of the Conscience (9:14)*

...¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who...offered himself without blemish to God...

(1) The Blood of Christ (9:14a,c)

Schreiner: The blood of Christ is far better than the sacrifice of bulls, goats, and heifers. After all, it is the blood of a human being, and not just any human being; it is the blood of the Messiah—the King of Israel and the entire world (Ps. 110:1). Animals offered in sacrifice had to be ‘without blemish’ (*ἄμωμον, amōmon*). Animals were physically unblemished, but Christ was morally unblemished (cp. 1 Pe. 1:19). Here the author picks up again the notion that Christ was sinless (4:15; 7:26-28). Jesus ‘offered (*προσήνεκεν, prosēnegken*) Himself,’ and the word for offering is often used to designate offerings in the OT (e.g., Ex. 32:6; Lev. 1:2, 5, 13-15; 3:6; etc.), and so it is clear that we have the language of sacrifice here.

Bruce: But it is no mere ceremonial cleansing that is effected by the sacrifice of Christ. Those earlier rituals might effect eternal purification, but the blood of Christ—His offering up of Himself to God—cleanses the conscience; it does the very thing that they could not do (cp. 9:9). The animals used for sacrifice in earlier days were required to be physically unblemished; the

Hebrews – Lesson 20

life which Christ presented to God on the cross was a life free from inward blemish. Our Lord's complete holiness, His 'active obedience' to God, is essential to the efficacy of His sacrifice.

Phillips: There are three reasons why Christ's blood is superior and truly purifying. The first reason is that Christ's blood represents a better sacrifice. The old covenant required sacrificial animals to be without spot or blemish, and we see in verse 14 that Jesus offered Himself 'without blemish to God.' The old covenant required obedience to the law, and Christ fulfilled those demands. Therefore, Jesus came to fulfill the law with His own perfect obedience. He stood unblemished before God, able and willing to bear our sin, for He was Himself acceptable to God.

Phillips: The second reason Christ's blood is superior is that it is God's appointed means of our salvation. We see this in the reference to 'the blood of Christ.' The Christ was the Anointed One, the Promised One, the Servant of the Most High God. He came into this world with a commission, an appointment. The blood of bulls and goats was appointed by God for ceremonial cleansing but the superior blood of Christ was appointed for actual and eternal redemption from sin.

(2) The Eternal Spirit (9:14b)

...through the eternal Spirit...

Schreiner: The offering was 'through the eternal Spirit' (*διά πνεύματος αἰωνίου, dia pneumatos aiōniou*). It seems that the Spirit empowered and strengthened Jesus to give Himself to God as a sacrifice. It also seems that the word 'eternal' emphasizes the deity of the Spirit. Perhaps there is also an emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy so that Jesus' self-offering was in accord with the eternal plan of God. The offering through 'the eternal Spirit' secures 'eternal redemption' (9:12), 'eternal salvation' (5:9), and an 'eternal inheritance' (9:15).

Bruce: Those earlier sacrifices were but token sacrifices; the sacrifice of Christ was a real self-offering, accomplished on the moral and spiritual plane. The phrase 'through the eternal spirit' (as it is literally, whether the substantive be spelled with a capital 'S' or not) is extremely difficult to interpret with satisfactory precision. Behind our author's thinking lies the portrayal of the Isianic Servant of the Lord, who yields up His life to God as a guilt offering for many, bearing their sin and procuring their justification. When this Servant is introduced for the first time, God says: 'I have put My Spirit upon Him' (Is. 42:1). It is in the power of the Divine Spirit, accordingly, that the Servant accomplishes every phase of His ministry, including the crowning phase in which He accepts death for the transgression of His people, filling the twofold role of priest and victim, as Christ does in this epistle.

Phillips: Third, Jesus offered His sacrifice 'through the eternal Spirit.' In other words, His sacrifice was offered up not merely bodily but in spirit. We should always remember that Christ's physical sufferings were nothing compared to the spiritual agony of His alienation from the Father as God's wrath poured down upon Him in spirit. It was the spirit of Christ, not just the body of Christ, that drank up the penalty for sin; His infinite and divine spirit absorbed all the wrath of an infinite God. Because it was a spiritual sacrifice, this blood is applied to us spiritually, whereas the blood of animals could be applied only to the flesh. The whole point of this passage is that Christ's blood applies to the heart, a spiritual sacrifice that is spiritually applied, actually restoring us to fellowship with God who is spirit (Jn. 4:24).

(3) The Living God (9:14d)

...purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews – Lesson 20

Schreiner: In the last part of the verse, the benefits of Jesus' offering are considered. He cleanses consciences stained with guilt by His blood. Typically, uncleanness in the OT is from physical defilement. Such defilement is related to sin, but the cleansing Jesus accomplished is deeper, for He cleansed the conscience from the works that lead to death (cp. 6:1). Those who are thus cleansed are liberated to serve the living God. They are not saddled with guilt but purified from it, and thus they can live in confidence and joy before God and serve Him gladly.

MacArthur: Jesus provided the cleansing of our consciences 'from dead works to serve the living God.' He frees our consciences from guilt, a joy and a blessing that no Old Testament saint ever had or could have had. The former priests cleaned up the outside, and even that only symbolically, imperfectly, and temporarily. But Christ cleanses from the inside, where the real problem is. He does more than cleanse the old man; He replaces it with a new man. He cleanses our conscience, but He recreates our person. In Christ, we are not cleaned-up old creatures but redeemed new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

Bruce: It is not contact with a dead body, or anything of a material and external nature, that conveys real defilement or interrupts true communion with God. It is an inward and spiritual purification that is required if heart-communion with God is to be enjoyed. And therefore the 'dead words' from which the conscience must be cleansed cannot be, as some commentators have held, the unavailing ceremonial of Judaism; they must be things which convey inward and spiritual defilement. Their pollution is removed from the conscience by the work of Christ, so that men and women, emancipated from inward bondage, can worship God in spirit and in truth.

Phillips: This leads to the second main point of this passage, that Christ's blood, being superior to that of bulls and goats, has the power to cleanse the conscience of sinners. What is the purpose for this grace that is offered in the blood of Jesus Christ? There are many reasons, of course; God's love and Christ's glory head the list. But one purpose is directly tied to the high-priestly office of our Lord and the tabernacle in which this passage fits. We are called into God's priestly service. When we consider the wonderful work of grace that has brought us salvation, the shedding of Christ's precious blood, we need to ask, 'What is this for?' The purpose is not simply our own benefit. It is not merely that we should escape a deserved judgment, much less that we should have a nice, quiet, affluent Christian existence. The purpose is that the living God might have a fitting priesthood, for the service and praise of His glorious name. This cleansing in Christ's blood is not the end, but only the beginning for the Christian.

Phillips: The Greek word 'to serve' (*latreuein*) has a specifically priestly connotation. It is the service of the priests in the tabernacle we are called to perform, not outwardly, but spiritually. The priests entered into the holy place to light the lampstand, and we too are to serve as light-bearers for all the world. They came and sent incense up before God's throne, and so, too, we are ministers of intercessory prayer with real access to the throne of God. Unlike the Old Testament priests, our service takes place with the veil torn asunder, with God's presence unhindered and our service readily accepted in Christ. We were made and redeemed to serve God, and it is in the service of Him that we discover our true freedom.

Phillips: Verse 14 speaks of our cleansing from 'dead works.' This is what the world is busy about, works that if not sinful are certainly pointless and dead from the perspective of eternity. Building empires that will fall, buying things that do not satisfy or last, serving ambitions that are destined for the grave. To neglect God, to refuse His service, to deny His presence and rule is to shrink into the dust. It is to be ruled by the flesh, as beasts rather than as men and women God made in His image. Isn't this just what our secular, unbelieving society is discovering? But not

Hebrews – Lesson 20

so the Christian. We are priests with a holy calling, a service of joy born of gratitude, for a God who loves us enough to have shed the precious blood of Christ. What we do for Him will carry beyond the grave, lasting forever in heaven, where Christ reigns now as the priest upon the throne at the right hand of the living God.

B. The Inauguration of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15-22)

1. Death Inaugurated the New Covenant (9:15-17)

a) *The Mediator of the New Covenant (9:15)*

(1) The Mediator's Identity (9:15a)

¹⁵*Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant...*

Schreiner: Since Jesus entered God's presence and cleansed the conscience through His blood, He is the mediator of a new covenant (cp. also 12:24). In 8:6 Jesus is said to be 'the mediator of a better covenant.' The newness of the covenant is evident since Jesus enters the presence of God, which is something that was not accomplished under the old covenant. The new covenant, then, was inaugurated by Jesus' death, signifying that the former covenant established in Exodus 24 is no longer operative.

Phillips: A mediator is someone who represents two different parties. In order to mediate between the holy God and sinful humans, Christ first had to die. This reasoning starts with the understanding that the first covenant—the old covenant under Moses—required the obedience of the people. They had to fulfill its commands or be condemned. Its key words were expressed in the giving of the law, to which the people responded, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (Ex. 19:8). If they failed to do so, if they transgressed the law, the covenant demanded God's punishment on their sin.

Hughes: The job of a mediator is to arbitrate in order to bring two parties together—here, the holy God and sinful humanity. As the Father's mediator, it is Christ's job to bridge the vast gulf and obtain entrance for us into God's holy presence. His sacrifice is the medium of arbitration, because His shed blood is both retroactive and proactive in bringing forgiveness for sins.

(2) The Mediator's Achievement (9:15b)

...so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...

Schreiner: The purpose of Jesus' covenantal work is the main point of the verse. As the mediator of the new covenant, He ensured that those who are called would receive the promise of eternal inheritance. 'Those who are called' (*οἱ κεκλημένοι, oi keklēmenoi*) likely designates God's powerful, life-changing, and effectual call in the life of believers. Because of Jesus' mediatorial new covenant work, those who are called by God are guaranteed that they will obtain 'the eternal inheritance' (*αἰωνίου κληρονομίας, aiōniou klēronomias*). The one who offered Himself through the *eternal* Spirit has secured an *eternal* inheritance.

Bruce: Now that this redemptive death has taken place, the 'promise of their eternal inheritance' has been made good to those 'who have been called'; the new covenant, and everything that the grace of God provides under it, is forever theirs. 'Eternal' is an adjective which our author associates especially with the new covenant; that covenant itself is eternal (13:20), and so the redemption which it provides and the inheritance into which it brings the people of God are

Hebrews – Lesson 20

likewise eternal (vv. 12, 15); the Mediator of this covenant, having offered Himself up to God as ‘a spiritual and eternal sacrifice’ (v. 14), has become to all who obey Him the ‘source of eternal salvation’ (5:9). The eternal inheritance of grace and glory both here and hereafter is for those who ‘have been called’—for those who have already been designated ‘partakers of a heavenly calling’ (3:1).

MacArthur: The ‘eternal inheritance’ that the Old Testament saints could not receive without Christ’s death was salvation, the total forgiveness that alone could bring total access to God. The New Covenant was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ and provided the full salvation that Israel had been hoping for since the very beginning.

(3) The Mediator’s Ability (9:15c)

...since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Schreiner: Under the first covenant death was necessary to be redeemed (by which he probably means forgiven) from the transgressions committed under that covenant. That death was required is evident from the sacrifices that were offered for sin, purification, reparation, and the Day of Atonement (Lev. 1-7; 16).

MacArthur: People often wonder how Old Testament believers were saved, since salvation is only through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). They were saved on the same basis as believers today are saved—by the finished work of Christ. Part of Christ’s work as mediator of the New Covenant was ‘the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant.’ One of the first accomplishments of Jesus’ death was to redeem all those who had believed in God under the Old Covenant. The point being made here to the writer’s original readers—who were Jews, both saved and unsaved—is that Christ’s atoning death was retroactive (cp. Rom. 3:24-25). Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) also pictured symbolically what Christ’s atonement did actually. It, too, was retroactive. When the high priest sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, the unintentional sins of the people were covered for the previous year.

Hughes: Our text is specific about the *retroactive* power of His blood. Significantly, the annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (which prefigured Christ’s ultimate sacrifice) was also retroactive, atoning for the sins of ignorance committed over the past year (9:7). But Christ’s death was surpassingly retroactive, reaching all the way back to the Garden of Eden (cp. Rom. 3:25). Because of this, we understand that believers were saved under the old covenant through their obedient faith in God—demonstrated by their sacrifices as they humbly acknowledged that sin required death and as they placed their souls under the mercy of God. Their sacrifices were not a means of salvation, but they were evidence of believing, faithful hearts. To these, Christ’s blood extended its retroactive power. Those of us who are new covenant believers are beneficiaries of the *proactive* power of Christ’s death, for He has paid for our sins. When He gave us the grace to believe, He activated His saving power in our lives—paying for our sins past, present, and future.

Bruce: That Jesus is ‘mediator of a better covenant’—the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah—has already been stated in 8:6. But now the basis of His mediatorship is made plain; that basis is His sacrificial death. By virtue of His death redemption has been provided for those who had broken the law of God; the life of Christ was the costly price paid to liberate them from their sins.

Hebrews – Lesson 20

b) *The Testator of the New Covenant (9:16-17)*

¹⁶For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

(1) The Testator's *Diathēkē*

Schreiner: Some commentators argue, contrary to most interpreters that the reference in verses 16-17 is to the covenant rather than a will. They support this reading for a number of reasons. First, wills in the Greco-Roman world were valid when written down, and hence they didn't require a death to be instituted. Second, the argument makes the best sense if there is no transition from covenant to will, for nowhere else in Hebrews does the word 'covenant' (*διαθήκη*, *diathēkē*) refer to a will. Third, the word 'dead' (*ἐπὶ νεκροῖς* *epi nekrois*) in verse 17 is plural, and thus the verse may teach that a covenant is 'confirmed on the basis of dead animals,' demonstrating that a covenant rather than a will is in view. Fourth, the verb translated 'established' (*φέρεσθαι*, *pheresthai*) never means a death is confirmed or validated.

Schreiner: Deciding this matter is difficult, but I slightly favor a reference to a will or testament in verses 16-17. First, we have often seen that the writer isn't technical or precise, and hence he probably refers to what is normally the case. A will doesn't usually take effect until someone dies. By way of contrast, covenants are often enacted without the death of someone making the covenant. So it is difficult to see how the author could be speaking of covenants in general here. Second, it is unlikely that the plural for 'dead' can be pressed since the plural for 'dead' is often abstract. The reference to dead animals, in other words, isn't clear. Third, analogies are analogies. They don't apply to or explain every situation. The author establishes a point of contact between wills and covenants without implying that in every instance wills demand the death of the one who enacts the will. Fortunately, the meaning of the paragraph as a whole isn't greatly affected whether one sees a reference to a covenant or a will here. In either case the importance of death for receiving of an inheritance is the main point.

Bruce: Why was the Mediator's death necessary for the ratification of the covenant? It is not easy to follow the argument here in an English version, because we are almost bound to use two different English words to represent two different aspects of the meaning of one Greek word, whereas our author's argument depends on his use of the same Greek word throughout. The Greek word is *diathēkē*, which has the comprehensive sense of 'settlement.' As used elsewhere in the epistle, the particular kind of settlement which *diathēkē* denotes is a covenant graciously bestowed by God upon His people, by which He brings them into a special relationship with Himself. But in vv. 16 and 17 of our present chapter it is used of another kind of settlement, a last will and testament, in which property is bequeathed by the owner to various other persons on the understanding that they have no title to it until he dies. There are, in fact, some scholars who have maintained that 'testament' is the sense of *diathēkē* throughout this epistle, if not indeed throughout the Greek Bible. 'Testament' is certainly the predominant sense of the word in Hellenistic Greek; but in the Greek Bible it usually takes its meaning from the Old Testament Hebrew word *berîth*, which does not have the sense of 'testament.'

Bruce: It simply is not true that 'where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it'—nor of necessity the death of anyone else. 'The death of him that made it' is, as the AV/KJV and the NEB simply and rightly put it, 'the death of the testator'; a testament is the only kind of *diathēkē* which depends for its ratification on the death of the person who makes it.

Hebrews – Lesson 20

Phillips: It is at this point that the idea of a will is introduced to this discussion. The Greek word for will (*diathēkē*) is also the word for covenant. This is the standard New Testament word to translate the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*. A covenant is a solemn arrangement, the stipulated terms for a relationship between two parties. But *diathēkē* was also the Greek word for a last will and testament, and the writer of Hebrews capitalizes on this wordplay. This is the only time the word is used in this sense in the New Testament, yet it is because of this passage that the two halves of the Bible are known as the Old and New Testaments.

Hughes: The word ‘covenant’ (*diathēkē*), which he uses twice in verse 15, is also used twice in verses 16-17, where it is translated ‘will’ (‘covenant’ and ‘will’ are the same Greek word). But the reason for the two different translations is that the word is used *religiously* in verse 15 (hence ‘covenant’) and *legally* in verses 16-17 (meaning ‘will’).

(2) The Testator’s Death

Schreiner: Death was necessary for redemption (i.e., forgiveness) under the old covenant. The connection between death and the covenant is pressed further. A will is only established on the basis of the death of the one making it. Analogously, such is true under the old covenant as well, for sacrificial animals represent the death of the one making the covenant. Under the new covenant, of course, the covenant is established on the basis of Jesus’ death. In the context of discussing a will, the author, not surprisingly, resorts to legal language. A will typically takes effect at death, and when one is alive, the provisions of the will are not yet in effect. The author constructs an analogy between a will and a covenant here. Covenant benefits (like the benefits of a will) are generally granted to those who are covenant members only upon the death of the one making the covenant.

Bruce: It is quite likely that the testamentary idea suggested itself to our author’s mind because of his reference to the ‘eternal inheritance’ at the end of verse 15. But all analogies from ordinary life must be defective when they are applied to Him who rose from the dead and is thus able personally to secure for His people the benefits which He died to procure for them. He is testator and executor in one, surety and mediator alike. Christ, says our author, is the Mediator of the new *diathēkē*, and there is one kind of *diathēkē* which serves particular well to illustrate this aspect of His ministry—namely, the testamentary *diathēkē* which does not come into effect before the death of the person who makes it. It is well known that this kind of settlement cannot be ratified as long as its author lives. And so it is with the new *diathēkē*, its validity depends upon the fact that its author has died.

MacArthur: A testament, by its very nature, requires the death of the testator. ‘Covenant’ or testament, is from the Greek *diathēkē*, the basic meaning of which corresponds closely to that of our present-day *will*. A will does not take effect until the one who made it dies. Until that time, its benefits and provisions are only promises, and necessarily future. The point being made in verses 16-17 is simple and obvious. Building on verse 15, the writer is saying that God gave a legacy, an eternal inheritance, to Israel in the form of a covenant, a will. As with any will, it was only a type of promisor note until the provider of the will died.

Phillips: The writer’s point is that the new covenant may be viewed as a last will and testament, particularly in that its benefits are disbursed only in the event of the death of the one who made it. The purpose of the will is to make an arrangement for the distribution of wealth after death. It was by dying, therefore, that Jesus made all the riches that are found in Him available to us,

Hebrews – Lesson 20

specifically, the blessings of His covenant obedience. When we are joined to Him in faith, therefore, we are made heirs of this great inheritance.

Hughes: A will is activated by the death of the one who made the will, the testator. The writer's point is that Christ's death activated His incredibly rich will (cp. 2 Cor. 8:9). Think of the benefits we enjoy because of Christ's death: forgiveness, a clear conscience, peace (*shalom*—well-being, wholeness), purpose, and ultimately eternal life in heaven! All this is impossible apart from His death. And it is all activated by His death! Jesus has become both *testator* and *mediator* of the new covenant—dual functions impossible for any being except one who rose from the dead. Jesus died, leaving the greatest inheritance ever. But He also lives to mediate His will.

2. Blood Inaugurated the Old Covenant (9:18-22)

a) *Blood Was Required (9:18)*

¹⁸*Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.*

Schreiner: The analogy is now applied to the old covenant or to what the author calls 'the first' (*ἡ πρώτη, ē prōtē*) covenant. The word 'first' is important, indicating that a successor follows and that the first covenant is temporary. Even the first covenant, i.e., the Sinai covenant, was inaugurated or 'put into effect' with blood. The covenant was established by virtue of the death of sacrificial animals.

Bruce: For the matter of that, he goes on, the earlier *diathēkē* also required death for its ratification—not in that case, the death of the one who made it, but death nevertheless. And he recalls the incident of Exodus 24:3-8, the inauguration of the covenant of Moses' day at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews next turns again to the example of the old covenant: 'Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.' The word 'therefore' refers back to verse 15, Christ having died as a ransom for those who sinned under the first covenant.

Hughes: The writer wants his readers to understand that old covenant law was initiated with a pronounced spilling of sacrificial blood that prefigured Christ's blood in initiating the new covenant. The noun 'blood' is used six times in verses 18-22. Why the perpetual sea of blood? For one main reason—to teach that sin demands the shedding of blood. This in no way suggests that blood itself atones for sins *ex opere operato* (otherwise sacrifices would have been bled rather than killed), but it does demonstrate that sin both brings and demands death. Steaming blood provided the sign—even the smell—of the old covenant. Sin brings death ... sin brings death ... sin brings death.

MacArthur: Forgiveness demands 'blood.' This truth is directly in line with the previous point (a testament demands death), but with a different shade of meaning. Blood is a symbol of death, and therefore follows closely the idea of a testator's having to die in order for a will to become effective. But blood also suggests the animal sacrifices that were marks of the Old Covenant, even, in fact, of the Abrahamic covenant. In the Old Covenant, the death of animals was typical and prophetic, looking forward to the death of Christ that would ratify the second covenant. Even before the old priestly sacrifices were begun, the covenant itself was 'inaugurated,' or ratified, with blood.

Hebrews – Lesson 20

b) *Blood Was Sprinkled (9:19-21)*

(1) Covenant Ratification (9:19-20)

¹⁹*For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,* ²⁰*saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.”*

Schreiner: The author demonstrates from the OT that the first covenant was established with blood (cp. Ex. 24:3-8). Hebrews says that ‘water, scarlet wool, and hyssop’ were present. None of these things are mentioned in Exodus 24, though all three are included in the ceremony of the heifer (Num. 19:6, 18), and perhaps the author assumed the same were used for the ceremony in Exodus 24. Exodus says that Moses sprinkled the altar and the people (Ex. 24:6, 9), while Hebrews says he sprinkled the people and the book of the covenant. In either case the blood purified both the people and the other elements of the covenant. Since Hebrews links blood with forgiveness of sin (see v. 22), the sprinkling of blood is conceived of as removing the defilement of Israel. On this basis, Israel could enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord.

Phillips: Verses 19-21 recount the ratification of the old covenant when it was first given through Moses. Exodus 24 tells us that Moses began by reciting the whole law, after which the people replied, ‘All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do’ (Ex. 24:3). We have already observed how fateful those words were, given the fact that they would not be fulfilled. The next morning, however, Moses got up and offered sacrifices to the Lord (Ex. 24:6-8).

Hughes: Exodus 24 gives the full account of this (see Ex. 24:3-8). From Exodus and Hebrews we understand that everything of significance was doused with blood—half on the altar and the other half on the people and the scroll. It was not a pretty sight, except in its supreme symbolism. The altar, the people, and book dripped with blood. This done, the Exodus account records that Moses, his lieutenants, and seventy elders ascended Mt. Sinai, where they all saw, from a distance, God standing on a pavement of sapphire. Moses then left them, going on to the pinnacle where he spend forty days amidst God’s glory which ‘was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain’ (Ex. 24:9-18).

Bruce: Verse 19 and 20 present what is for the most part a summary of Exodus 24:3-8, but the summary includes certain features which do not appear in the Exodus narrative. The reference to goats in v. 19 is probably a later addition to the text of Hebrews; Ex. 24:5 specifies calves as the sacrificial animals used on this occasion. But whereas in the Exodus narrative Moses sprinkles part of the sacrificial blood on the altar (as representing God, the Author of the covenant), and part on the people (who are thus brought into God’s covenant), here he sprinkles it on the *book* and on the people. The book, indeed, containing the divine commandments which constituted the basis of the covenant, might represent God in this act as fittingly as would the altar. Again, whereas the Exodus narrative describes Moses as sprinkling nothing but blood, here the blood is accompanied by water, scarlet wool, and hyssop. We have no evidence for the origin of these variations on the Exodus narrative; for them as for some of the details of the tabernacle furniture in v. 4 (the position of the incense-altar and the contents of the ark) our author may well have drawn upon some source which is no longer extant.

Bruce: The hyssop, or marjoram, is probably envisaged as the means by which the blood was sprinkled on this occasion, just as hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood of the paschal lamb around the doorway of each Israelite house in Egypt (Ex. 12:22), to sprinkle blood (and water)

Hebrews – Lesson 20

on the cured leper or on the house which had been cleared of a ‘leprous’ infection (Lev. 14:4-7; 49-53), and (most significantly), to sprinkle the red heifer ashes on persons or objects which had become ceremonially defiled by contact with the dead (Num. 19:18). The water and scarlet wool which our author mentions along with the sacrificial blood are also reminiscent of the ritual of the red heifer in Num. 19; it looks as if features of that ritual are here associated with the ratification of the ancient covenant. The two passages are linked by their common interest in ritual aspersion.

Schreiner: The text of Exodus 24:8 is quoted in v. 20. Instead of making or cutting the covenant (*διέθετο, dietheto*), the author uses the word ‘commanded’ (*ἐνετείλατο, eneteilato*). The use of the verb ‘commanded’ puts the emphasis on the covenant requirements Israel had to fulfill. But what the author really stresses is ‘blood’ (*αἷμα, aima*). The covenant had validity only because blood was sprinkled on the people and other covenant objects.

(2) Tabernacle Inauguration (9:21)

²¹*And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.*

Phillips: As Hebrews 9:21-22 go on to observe, just about everything was sprinkled by blood. The point was that the mark of death was upon this covenant and all its ordinances and stipulations.

Schreiner: The necessity of blood for purification continues to be pursued. Both the tabernacle and other items of worship were sprinkled with blood at the inauguration of the covenant. The practice of sprinkling blood for purification was a common procedure in the OT. The author understands that purification isn’t granted without the sprinkling of blood.

Hughes: The inauguration of the covenant was at once a glorious and bloody affair. So was the subsequent beginning of tabernacle worship some time later. On its inauguration day, the gorgeous tabernacle as well as its tapestries, golden appointments, and priestly vestments all dripped with blood.

Bruce: Nor was the ratification of the covenant the only occasion on which similar purification by the sprinkling of blood was carried out under the old order. The tabernacle itself and the vessels of divine service were similarly sprinkled.

c) *Blood Was Symbolic (9:22)*

(1) Blood Was a Symbol (9:22a)

²²*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood...*

Bruce: Indeed, our author goes on, ‘almost everything’ which requires to be ceremonially cleansed under the Old Testament law must be cleansed by means of blood. ‘Almost everything,’ but not absolutely everything; there are certain exceptions. For example, an impoverished Israelite might bring a tenth of an ephah (four pints) of fine flour to the priest as his sin offering instead of a lamb or even instead of two turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 5:11). But such exceptions were rare; the general rule was that ceremonial cleansing or atonement had to be effective by means of blood: ‘apart from the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness’ (v. 22b).

Hebrews – Lesson 20

Hughes: This text says ‘almost everything’ because exceptions were made—for example, in the case of the poor. If an impoverished Israelite could not afford a lamb or the next best thing, a pair of turtledoves or pigeons, he was permitted to bring a cereal offering for a *sin* offering (Lev. 5:11ff.). This is because it was understood that blood was a symbol, and if the symbol was beyond one’s reach, a secondary, ersatz symbol would suffice.

MacArthur: We need to keep in mind that the blood was a symbol. It is not surprising that the Old Covenant allowed a symbol for a symbol. A Jew who was too poor to bring even a small animal for a sacrifice was allowed to bring one-tenth of an ephah (about two quarts) of fine flour instead (Lev. 5:11). His sins were covered just as surely as those of the person who could afford to offer a lamb or goat or turtledove or pigeon (Lev. 5:6-7). This exception is clear proof that the old cleansing was symbolic. Just as the animal blood symbolized Christ’s true atoning blood, so the ephah of flour symbolized and represented the animal blood. This non-blood offering for sin was acceptable because the old sacrifice was entirely symbolic anyway. Yet this was the only exception. And even the exception *represented* a blood sacrifice. The basic symbol could not be changed because what is symbolized could not be changed (see Lev. 17:11).

(2) Blood Symbolizes Forgiveness (9:22b)

..and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Schreiner: The importance of blood is driven home in the concluding statement of the paragraph. We have already seen that the first covenant was inaugurated and ratified with blood. In other words, death was necessary for the covenant to take effect. Blood was fundamental for the covenant. Virtually everything is cleansed by blood according to the law. The pervasiveness of blood is evident in sacrificial practices. Indeed, the sacrificial cultus of the OT teaches that there is no forgiveness apart from the shedding of the blood. This is evident from the various sacrifices of Leviticus 1-7 and the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). To be forgiven of sin, as the Day of Atonement indicates, blood had to be spilt. A death had to occur.

MacArthur: The purpose of the blood was to symbolize sacrifice for sin, which brought cleansing from sin. Therefore, ‘without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness’ (cp. Lev. 17:11). Since the penalty for sin is death, nothing but death, symbolized by shedding of blood, can atone for sin. We cannot enter into God’s presence by self-effort to be righteous. If we, on our own, could be good, we would not need atonement. God has set the rules. The soul that sins will die. The soul that is saved will be saved through the sacrifice of God’s Son. For this sacrifice there is no exception, no substitute, for this is the real thing. Because they were symbols, God provided a limited and strictly qualified exception (flour) to the old sacrifices). But there can be no exception for the real sacrifice, because it is the only way to God. Forgiveness is a costly, costly thing.

Hughes: From this lavish use of blood in the inauguration of the two great institutions of the old covenant (the covenant and the tabernacle), we are given this principle: ‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.’ This saying was proverbial in Biblical culture and was based on Leviticus 17:11—‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.’ Sin must bring the forfeiting of life. Sin demands death.

Phillips: The blood of the covenant showed the penalty for breaking the covenant, but it also pointed forward to Christ and the new covenant in Him. ‘Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,’ the writer observes. But it is therefore true that *with* the shedding of

Hebrews – Lesson 20

blood—that is, with the death of a suitable sacrifice—forgiveness may be received. By sprinkling the blood of an animal on the people, Moses is saying that God would accept that substitution as a temporary reprieve until the true Substitute came.

Phillips: Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. This is the universal testimony of Scripture. This is what made Abel's sacrifice better than Cain's (Gen. 4:3-4). Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Let us get this into our heads, that once we have sinned against God there is no way for the sin to be put away, except by the shedding of blood. But the price for our redemption is one that we cannot pay ourselves and yet survive. What we need is someone to pay it for us, a substitute, in whom is the power of eternal life.

Phillips: This means that all those who were saved under the old covenant were saved by the new covenant, even when they were living under the old administration. By faith, they trusted in the blood of the sacrifices, and through them they trusted in the blood of Christ. Perhaps the best example of this is Psalm 51:7, where King David cries, 'Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' Hyssop was the plant that Moses and the priests used to make the brush for sprinkling the sacrificial blood. David was saying, in effect, sprinkle on my sin the blood of Jesus Christ, and I will be cleansed whiter than snow.

Phillips: This is simply the truth of the Bible, that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, without the application of that blood to our souls by faith, there is no cleansing for our sins or our guilty conscience. Unless you have obeyed God without sin—and not one of us has—then you require this very blood if you are to be forgiven and loved by God. What you must do is confess your sins trust in Christ's saving work, and you will be cleansed before God, whiter than snow.

Hughes: The old covenant sailed on a sea of blood, for two vast reasons. First, to emphasize the seriousness of sin. The Bible takes sin seriously, more than any other religious scripture. Sin alienates one from God. Sin is rooted in the hearts of humanity. Sin cannot be vindicated by any self-help program. Sin leads to death—and it will not be denied. The second reason is the costliness of forgiveness. Death is the payment. It will either be Christ's life or ours!

For next time: Read Hebrews 9:23-10:4.