

Hebrews 10:9

Pastor: Hebrews 10:9: God takes away the first covenant to establish the second.

“[T]hen He said, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.’ He takes away the first in order to establish the second.”

As examined previously in our cross-examination of Hebrews 8:13 and the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:7-13; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34), the New Covenant involves not only a permanent cleansing from sin *but also* a supernatural transcription of God’s Torah onto the hearts of His people—which is hardly akin to some kind of abolition of the Law. The New Covenant has been inaugurated because of Yeshua’s sacrifice and His priestly work in Heaven (Hebrews 8:6). A closer examination of the context here, for Hebrews 10:9, is necessary, so we can evaluate whether or not a covenant is principally what is being discussed—or once again whether it is the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices compared and contrasted to the final sacrifice of the Messiah.

Previously in Hebrews 10:5-7, the author makes light of an important Psalm declaration, which is intended to demonstrate the inadequacy of the Torah’s animal sacrifices in view of the work and final atonement offered by Yeshua in Himself:

“Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. THEN I SAID, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD” [Psalm 40:6-8].”

It is absolutely key to recognize that the author’s reference to Psalm 40:6-8, while demonstrating the limitation of animal sacrifice—can in no way be taken as a negative evaluation of the Torah. Psalm 40:6-8 lays forth much of the ministry of Yeshua, which surely involves the substitution of His own body in place of an animal sacrifice. It also involves His perfect obedience to Moses’ Teaching: “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).

That the animal sacrifices of the Torah were limited in their ability to offer resolution, to the human sin problem, is in fact something seen or alluded to throughout the Tanach itself:

- “For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering” (Psalm 51:16).
- ““What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats” (Isaiah 1:11).
- “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).
- “I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; and I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings” (Amos 5:21-22).
- “With what shall I come to the LORD *and* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8).

Some of these Tanach passages were delivered within a specific ancient context, perhaps rebuking ancient Israelite audiences for their shallowness in their dedication to God, or with people errantly thinking that going through the motions of offering sacrifices could solve their problems with Him. Yeshua’s obedience to the will of the Father, offering up Himself as a permanent atonement for sinful humanity, has affected a solution to all of this:

“After saying above, ‘SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*’ [Psalm 40:6] (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL’ [Psalm 40:7]” (Hebrews 10:8-9a).

It is not difficult to see in Hebrews 10:5-9a that Yeshua has obeyed the Father’s will—which surely includes His perfect obedience to the Torah—and thus each of us can be granted eternal salvation by belief in Him. Concurrent with this, there has definitely been a significant change or transition which has occurred with salvation history progressing forward.

The author of Hebrews asserts, “He takes away the first in order to establish the second” (Hebrews 10:9b). The RSV/NRSV actually says “He abolishes the first in order to establish the second,” but this seems to be too jaded a rendering for the verb *anaireō* (ἀναίρειω). With the animal sacrifices of the Torah in view, it is important to recognize how *anaireō* would mean “**to get rid of by execution, do away with, destroy**” (BDAG),¹ perhaps involving “to get rid of someone by execution, often with legal or quasi-legal procedures” (Louw-Nida Lexicon).² It is only with the Messiah Yeshua’s sacrifice made upon the tree at Golgotha, that the second can actually be established. The Father has effectively “killed” (“takes away,” HCSB) the continued viability of the first order of sacrifices by the death of His Son, so the second order of the Son’s single sacrifice can stand.

It is quite keen for us to be aware of how Hebrews 10:9b says *anairei to prōton hina to deuteron stēsē* (ἀναίρει τὸ πρῶτον ἵνα τὸ δεύτερον στήσῃ), with no nouns or pronouns specifically associated with “first” or “second.” F.F. Bruce indicates, “The ordinal numbers ‘first’ (πρῶτος [*prōtos*]) and ‘second’ (δεύτερος [*deuteros*]) are neuter here; no particular substantive is understood with them. ‘The first’ is the old sacrificial system; ‘the second’ is our Lord’s perfect self-dedication to do the will of God.”³ The Phillips New Testament paraphrase of Hebrews 10:9b is not that too far off the mark: “he is dispensing with the old order of sacrifices, and establishing a new order of obedience to the will of God.” Interpreters, who have tended to favor the Torah being a thing of past history for God’s people, still have to recognize that the “first” and “second” regard the Levitical service and sacrifices *contrasted to* Yeshua’s service and final sacrifice:

- Donald A. Hagner: “[T]he former commandments and covenant must give way to the new. Here it is the sacrifices of animals that must give way to the sacrifice of Christ in obedience to God’s will.”⁴
- David A. deSilva: “...a ‘first’ grouping of rites that God neither wants nor finds pleasure in (the animal sacrifices, the ‘blood of bulls and goats’) [is contrasted to] a ‘second’ rite that speaks now of Jesus’ presentation of his own body as the means for effecting God’s will.”⁵
- Ben Witherington III: “‘First’ refers to the sacrifices of the Levitical system, while ‘second’ applies to Christ...”⁶

The result of Yeshua the Messiah offering up Himself for sinful humanity is quite important indeed: “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Yeshua the Messiah once for all...For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:10, 14). While the sacrifice and resurrection of Yeshua undoubtedly compose the most significant events of salvation history, there is still a future to come as we await His return and the establishment of His Messianic Kingdom on Earth (Hebrews 10:12-13; cf. Psalm 110:1). And even with Yeshua’s sacrifice and the effectual “killing off” of the need for the animal sacrifices of the Torah for the atonement of sin, the Torah’s instruction, as a guide for Believers in the ways of holiness and sanctification to be cast aside, is not at all an appropriate conclusion to

¹ BDAG, 64.

² BibleWorks 8.0: Louw-Nida Lexicon.

Cf. Luke 23:32; Acts 10:39; 13:28 where Yeshua’s execution is detailed.

³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 243 fn#48.

⁴ Hagner, *Hebrews*, 155.

⁵ deSilva, *Hebrews*, 322.

⁶ Witherington, *Hebrews-James-Jude*, 279.

draw. It is not unimportant that within his immediate argument, the author of Hebrews appeals to and repeats the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:33-34:

“THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,’ *He then says*, ‘AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE” (Hebrews 10:16-17).

Even though the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices may soon be gone for Hebrews’ First Century audience, this would not be substantial justification for them to just completely ignore the Torah and its code of conduct. While he unfortunately uses language such as “superseded” and “abolished,” Bruce’s overall conclusions on Hebrews 10:9 are not at all incorrect. With the completion of Yeshua’s sacrifice, the New Covenant can be enacted within the lives of the redeemed, and all of us can truly appreciate the value of God’s Torah:

“The sacrifices in which God is said to take no pleasure are the sacrifices prescribed by the ancient cultic law of Israel; now that cultic law is to be superseded by a new order, inaugurated by Christ’s perfect obedience to the will of God...[T]he old order is abolished; in the second the new is established. The terms of the new covenant include the provision that God’s law will henceforth be engraved in his people’s hearts; and it was supremely fitting that this should be preeminently true of him through whose obedience and blood the new covenant has been ratified.”⁷

The author of Hebrews, while highly lauding the final offering of Yeshua the Messiah for fallen humanity’s sin—“Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering [of animal sacrifice] for sin” (Hebrews 10:18)—by no means thinks that the instruction of God’s Torah is to be dispensed with. The author, in fact, confirms the value of the Torah by quoting Jeremiah 31:33-34 in Hebrews 10:16-17, the promised New Covenant where the Lord will write His Law onto the hearts of His people.

The Torah is surely to be regarded and highly valued as instruction for all born again Believers today, **but** it must be understood in the light of Yeshua’s final sacrifice for sinners. Those of us who have received the Messiah into our lives do not need animal sacrifices to cover our sin, and for many within Hebrews’ First Century audience the vitality of the animal sacrifices needed to be effectively *killed off* (*anaireō*) in their minds. Hebrews 10:9 once again confirms the rightful transfer of the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices to Yeshua’s priesthood and **final sacrifice**, inaugurating the era of the New Covenant.

⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp 242-243.