

THE NATURE OF YESHUA IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES AND HEBREWS

“he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26, RSV).

What would these words mean for a largely First Century Jewish audience, likely on the verge of seeing the Second Temple destroyed? Would they be assurance to those who had, even after their coming to Messiah faith, still derived a great deal of comfort or security from knowing that sacrifices were being performed in Jerusalem? Consider the amount of faith a Jew in the Diaspora would have put in the Levitical priesthood, living separated from it, versus a Jewish person living in the Land of Israel who would have encountered it on a much more frequent basis. This is why our author writes that Yeshua’s sacrifice is sufficient to be offered only once.

It is absolutely true, that only those who had received Yeshua into their lives, can see beyond the Earthly shadow of the Levitical priesthood and Tabernacle service, into the Heavenly reality of Yeshua’s priesthood and service, that our author writes about. It is only those who have experienced a spiritual renewal by acknowledging Yeshua’s permanent offering of Himself, who can really know how Yeshua’s service in Heaven is more important than the service of human priests on Earth.

HEBREWS 10:11-14

“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD [Psalm 110:1], waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET [Psalm 110:1]. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Hebrews 10:11 says that “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices” (NIV), speaking of the fact that the work the Levitical, human priests perform, cannot bring final redemption.²²² This goes back to our author’s previous words in Hebrews 10:2,²²³ because if the animal sacrifices of the Torah could provide a permanent covering, they would only have had to be offered a single time, and then never again. Yet, Yeshua is attested in Hebrews 10:12a to have “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (RSV). Concurrent with this, our author once again quotes from the venerable Psalm 110:1, indicating that Yeshua has sat down at His Father’s right hand, and is presently waiting to return to Earth to defeat His enemies (Hebrews 10:12b-13). Bruce fairly summarizes, “Christ...by his self-oblation has accomplished once for all what generations of Levitical sacrifices had never done...The sacrifice of Christ has purified his people from the moral defilement of sin and assured them of permanent maintenance in a right relationship with God.”²²⁴

Yeshua’s single sacrifice has brought a permanent perfection to His own, which the sacrifices offered *over and over again* by the Levitical priesthood could not bring. This perfection is a permanent action, seen in the perfect verb *teteleiōken* (τετελείωκεν), whereas being made holy or sanctified is a continual action performed upon Believers by the Spirit, seen in the present passive participle *hagiazomenous* (ἁγιαζομένων). The ESV captures the verb tenses a little better: “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). Ellingworth also might clarify for you what the “perfection” brought actually concerns:

²²² This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²²³ “Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?” (Hebrews 10:2).

²²⁴ Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp 246, 247.

“τελειόω [*teleiōō*] implies the fulfillment of the...goal, namely an access to God which was formerly open only to the high priest.”²²⁵ Our author, somewhat repeating what he has stated earlier (Hebrews 8:8-12), will then once again assert how Yeshua’s work has inaugurated the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:15-17).

HEBREWS 10:19

“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Yeshua.”

Those who have been redeemed and spiritually regenerated through the saving work of Yeshua, can “have boldness to enter into the Holies by the blood of Yeshua” (Hebrews 10:19, TLV), even though such *parrēsia* (παρρησία) or “confidence” does require God’s people to approach Him with respect and not dishonor.²²⁶ People in general being able to approach the Lord, in such a manner, is quite different from the condition present in the pre-resurrection era—especially as the high priest would not linger in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. The Mishnah specifically attests, “He did not prolong his prayer, so as not to frighten the Israelites” (m.*Yoma* 5:1).²²⁷ The high priest would simply enter into the Holy of Holies, perform his necessary duties, and then get out lest the people think that he offended God and God had struck him dead somehow. The high priest would enter the Holy of Holies with a great deal of fear, but Believers should have a confidence, in approaching their Heavenly Father.

HEBREWS 12:1-3

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Yeshua, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Hebrews ch. 12 shifts the scene, from speaking of figures from Israel’s past, seen previously in ch. 11, to our author now discussing his audience’s present experience.²²⁸ The author of Hebrews will be exhorting his readers and listeners on the theme of discipline, and will ask them to consider the sufferings of Yeshua on their behalf. Lane makes the important point, “The Greek text exhibits elegant, genuinely oratorical word order, sonorous instances of effective word play, the use of alliteration, and carefully balanced clauses...These stylistic and linguistic features display a concern for rhetorical effect...The result is lively and animated discourse.”²²⁹ As you will likely see, there is a great deal of material that readers get to consider.

Hebrews’ audience is first admonished, “we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1, NIV). It is notable that our writer does not employ the term *nephelē* (νεφέλη), often referring to a single “cloud,” but instead *nephos* (νέφος), “a cloud, mass or pile of

²²⁵ Ellingworth, 511.

²²⁶ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²²⁷ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 272.

²²⁸ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²²⁹ William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1991), 406.