

The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

Century. Many in the Jewish community, either in the Land of Israel or in the Diaspora, had been raised in a culture that relied upon the high priest in the Temple to intercede for them before God. While this work was indeed important, with the ministry of Yeshua before the Father in Heaven, the Levitical service is not as necessary as it once was. Lane observes, “The point emphasized in v. 2 is that the possibility of access to God through a Levitical and earthly arrangement no longer exists because of their intrinsic inadequacy. Access is possible only through the ministering priest who serves in the heavenly sanctuary.”²¹⁴

Yeshua’s priesthood taking over where the Levitical priesthood leaves off is part of the “change of law” (Hebrews 7:12), or rearrangement that the Torah has experienced as a result of His sacrifice for human sin. Access to God the Father in a priestly context, for Hebrews’ First Century audience, would soon *only* be available through the Son functioning as High Priest in Heaven. To a largely Jewish audience that stood on the verge of the Temple’s destruction, these would have been candid words to cut to the quick of the problem of those denying or thinking about denying the Lord. The priestly service of Yeshua in Heaven is most superior to the best service any human priest could offer on Earth. Some would have been offended by this, and sadly today, there are some—even in the Messianic community—who still are to a degree. This is because there are those in the Messianic movement, who for whatever reason, fail to study the Torah from the perspective of how Messiah Yeshua has come in fulfillment of its sacrifices for sin, and the priesthood that was to regulate those sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:13-14

“The Messiah, the Spirit, and God”

“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, how much more will the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Hebrews 9:13-14 introduce a *qal v’chomer* or “light and heavy” argument of the importance of Yeshua’s shed blood, over that of goats and bulls.²¹⁵ Neither the blood of bulls or goats could provide internal redemption, but were limited to only providing external redemption. Bruce points out, “The blood of goats and bulls’ is a general term covering not only the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement but other sacrifices as well.”²¹⁶ Our author introduces the Greek word *tauros* (ταῦρος) or “bull,” not used previously in Hebrews 9:12, which was a specific reference to the *Yom Kippur* offering. *Taurus* is generally used in the LXX to render the Hebrew *baqar* (בָּקָר), often rendered as “ox” in our English Bibles.

There is a curious connection, though, with our author’s reference to “the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled” (Hebrews 9:13). This act was specifically intended for those who contacted a corpse, so they could become ritually clean again:

“The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, *and then* he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean” (Numbers 19:11-12).

²¹⁴ Ibid., 206.

²¹⁵ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²¹⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 214.

It is likely that our author uses general references, to show once again how these ordinances could not bring the complete redemption and total cleansing, that only Yeshua brings.

Certainly, if some level of “external purity” (NEB) was offered through the usage of the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of the heifer in a water mixture, our author is right to point out how Yeshua the Messiah’s blood can offer much, much more. He says, “Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God” (Hebrews 9:14, NLT). The author of Hebrews describes Yeshua’s offering of Himself as being “without blemish,” connecting his audience to the Torah’s requirements of how animals are to be offered:

“[F]or you to be accepted—it *must be* a male without defect from the cattle, the sheep, or the goats. Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you. When a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it” (Leviticus 22:19-21).

The term used in the Torah to describe something “without defect” or “without blemish” (RSV, NJPS), is *tamim* (טָמִים). *Tamim* has a variety of connotations, notably “**complete, unscathed, intact**,” “complete, blameless, of people,” “**without fault, free of blemish**,” and perhaps most important, “**perfect...of God**” (HALOT).²¹⁷ *Tamim* was rendered in the Septuagint as *amōmos* (ἄμωμος), meaning “*without blame, blameless*” (LS),²¹⁸ and this usage is employed by the writer of Hebrews. Because Yeshua is blameless—or perfect as the Son of God—He is able to “purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14, NRSV). Yeshua’s offering of Himself is able to provide that regeneration not only of the heart, but of the mind, so that we might worship God in a greater fullness.

Notice that the critical promise here is that Yeshua will cleanse people from “works that lead to death” (CJB/CJSB), “sinful deeds” (NLT), or even “the deadness of our former ways” (NEB), *nekrōn ergōn* (νεκρῶν ἔργων). Zane C. Hodges concludes that these “dead works” seem “to refer to the Levitical rituals,”²¹⁹ and hence by extension, the commandments of the Torah or Law of Moses. But this is where we must allow our author’s words to interpret themselves. Earlier he has spoken of “repentance from acts that lead to death” (Hebrews 6:1, NIV) or “repenting from evil deeds” (NLT). These are all the sinful violations of God’s commandments that condemn people as evildoers. Why would the author of Hebrews be saying that God wants to cleanse the keeping of His commandments from the conscience of people—when the essence of the New Covenant is Him writing the Law onto the hearts and minds of the redeemed (Hebrews 8:8-12)?

It is notable, though, that dead works can be performed by one’s perceived obedience of God’s commands. Hegg points out that dead works “are any works which, while doing them, we might think that we are earning God’s grace and favor.”²²⁰ Many in Hebrews’ First Century audience were likely keeping the Torah thinking that it would earn the Lord’s favor—but it could not. Only Yeshua’s offering up of Himself can bring one complete reconciliation with God. Likewise, how many in today’s Messianic community might think that their “Torah observance” will somehow bring God’s grace upon them—and they fail to remember Yeshua’s offering up of Himself? This is a dangerous place in which to find oneself, because it may lead

²¹⁷ HALOT, 2:1749.

²¹⁸ LS, 50.

²¹⁹ Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews,” in *BKCNT*, 802.

²²⁰ Hegg, *Hebrews*, 168.

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one to rely on an incomplete Levitical system for eternal redemption, when the author of Hebrews says that eternal redemption can only be accomplished through the blood of the Messiah and His priestly service.

Our author attests that the Messiah offered Himself *dia pneumatos aiōniou* (διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου), “through the eternal Spirit.” We see the Spirit operating through Yeshua, as prophesied by Isaiah:

“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations...The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners” (Isaiah 42:1; 61:1; cf. Luke 4:17-20).

It is quite noticable that in Hebrews 9:14 we see all three, principal members of the Godhead mentioned: “how much more will the blood of Messiah—who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God—cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (TLV). We see God, meaning the Father; we see the Messiah, meaning the Son; we see the eternal Spirit or the Holy Spirit. Contrary to anyone believing that a trinity of the Godhead was something solely invented by Church leaders of the Third and Fourth Centuries, we see evidence of it right here in the Epistle to the Hebrews, even without the formulation of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Hebrews 9:24-26

“The Single Sacrifice of the Messiah”

“For Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

When Yeshua entered into Heaven at His ascension, He “did not enter a man-made sanctuary” (Hebrews 9:24, NIV).²²¹ This is because the original holy place on Earth, be it a Tabernacle or a Temple, was “a...copy of the true one.” Note that the NASU has added the adjective “*mere*” in *italics*—adding a description that is not seen in the Greek *antitupa tōn alēthinōn* (ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν). While it is true that the Earthly Tabernacle is “only a pointer to the reality” (REB), the addition of something like “*mere*” or “*only*” by Bible translators, may be placed to somehow subtract from the fact that the Earthly Tabernacle and Temple did have value. The author of Hebrews does not demean the Earthly Tabernacle in ch. 9, but he does show how highly he regards it, in spite of the fact that the Sanctuary in Heaven is much more important.

The Tabernacle or Temple, as it is seen to readers of the Scriptures, is widely the most that common human reasoning can comprehend of the extra-dimensional dwelling or residence of the Lord. This is where Yeshua is now seated beside the Father, “to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Hebrews 9:24, RSV). The profundity of this is that “He did not do this to offer Himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another” (Hebrews 9:25, HCSB). Yeshua only had to enter into the Holy Place in Heaven a

²²¹ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.