

Exegesis of Hebrews 9:24-28

Steve Kurtzahn

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Context

Recall that the Spirit-inspired epistle to the Hebrews was written for Jewish Christians who were tempted to revert back to Judaism. The author is unknown, but it may have been the apostle Paul.

Chapter 9 of Hebrews begins with a discussion of the Old Testament tabernacle and how it was set up. It also offers a description of the Old Testament high priest's ministry. Note especially 9:1, "Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary," and 9:9, "...the gifts and the sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper." Then the inspired author speaks of Christ, our great high priest, who entered a greater tabernacle not made with hands—not a part of this creation. He didn't enter many times, but only once. He didn't use the blood of bulls and goats, but his own blood that really does cleanse our consciences.

The writer then tells us that for this reason, Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. He also discusses how a will doesn't go into effect until the person has died. That's why the first covenant was put into effect with blood. After reading the law to the children of Israel, Moses sprinkled blood on the people, on the scroll upon which the law was written, and everything used in their religious ceremonies. He also wrote: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," 9:22. So, just as the copies of the heavenly things were purified with sacrifices, so also the heavenly things themselves were purified by a better sacrifice. In verse 22, the inspired author of Hebrews now writes of how Christ himself did this...

Heb. 9:24

οὐ γὰρ εἰς χειροποίητα εἰσῆθεν ἅγια Χριστός, ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν, ἀλλ' εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανόν, νῦν ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

NIV-For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

Lit.- For Christ did not enter into a holy place made by human hands, copies of the real, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God in our behalf;

The γὰρ is explanatory. Unlike the high priest of the old covenant on the Great Day of Atonement, the Anointed One did not enter into a man-made Holy Place. Instead, he entered heaven itself, which is the ultimate reality¹. He appears in our behalf before the face of God. Like the high priest represented the people of Israel before Jehovah, so Jesus represents you and me as our Substitute.

The darkness and clouds of incense in the old sanctuary were meant as much to veil the unworthiness of the priest from God as the glory of God from the priest. Now Christ appears before God face to face with no intervening cloud. Perfect fellowship is attained by his perfect and stainless offering of Himself. All is clear between God and man. For it is... "for us" He enters this presence...²

¹ Page 338, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. 4, W. Robertson Nicoll, Editor, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1921.

² Page 339, Expositor's.

It's important to note Lenski's comment on the aorist of ἐμφανισθῆναι:

The aorist tense...denotes actuality and no more. There are no clocks and no calendars in heaven, no time but only timelessness, therefore the adverb "now" refers only to the actuality that is expressed by the aorist. This aorist is not constative.³

Heb. 9:25

οὐδ' ἵνα πολλάκις προσφέρῃ ἑαυτόν, ὡς περ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὰ ἅγια κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν ἐν αἵματι ἄλλοτρίῳ,

NIV-Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.

Lit.- nor that he should many times offer himself, just as the high priest enters into the holy place year after year with blood belonging to another;

Verse 25 continues the thought started in verse 24:

οὐ and now οὐδ': Christ did "not...nor," etc. Christ did not enter into a mere earthly sanctuary; **nor** (did he enter heaven) **in order to be an offering...**⁴

Jesus is also different from the Old Testament high priest in that our Lord did not offer himself many times, like the high priest did every year when he entered the temple with the blood of animals. Jesus entered to offer "himself." This is a sacrifice that cannot be repeated often.

Heb. 9:26

Ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου· νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς αθετησιν [τῆς] ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανέρωται.

NIV-Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Lit.- for otherwise it would have been necessary for him to suffer many times from the beginning of the world; but now once at the completion of the ages he has appeared, for the removal of sin, through his sacrifice.

If Jesus were like the Old Testament high priest, he would have to suffer over and over again, from the time our first parents fell into sin in Eden. But the truth of the matter is, when the time was right (Gal. 4:4), and all the past ages reached the goal God had intended them to reach (Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20), Jesus appeared "once." This "once" is the same as the "once for all" of verse 12. "Once" also stands in contrast to the "year after year" of verse 25. Why did Jesus appear once at the end of the ages? He appeared for the removal of sin through his sacrifice on the cross. His sacrifice stands in contrast to verse 25, where the high priest enters with blood not his own. It should also be noted that the removal of sin made the repetition of Christ's sacrifice unnecessary. The

³ Page 316, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James, R.C.H. Lenski, Wartburg Press: Columbus, OH, 1946.

⁴ Page 316, Lenski.

thought of this verse is expressed in one of our communion hymns, “Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord”:

*Offered was he for greatest and for least,
Himself the victim and himself the priest.* CW 309,1.

Heb. 9:27

καὶ καθ' ὅσον ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις,
kai; kaq j o{son ajpovkeitai toi'' ajnqrwnpoi'' a{pax ajpoqanei'n, meta; de; tou'to krivsi",

NIV-Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Lit.- And just as it is reserved to people once to die, and after this judgment,

The και shows us that again from another perspective the one sacrifice of Christ is illuminated. Lenski points out:

καὶ καθ' ὅσον is not causal...The phrase expresses only correspondence: in harmony with the way it happens in the case of men generally, so it happened in the case of Christ. It is laid away or reserved for them to die but once, and after that each receives judgment...the pronouncement of a verdict by the heavenly Judge. After life is done, there is no living it over again a few more times; what awaits each one after death is God's verdict, either acquittal or condemnation...

To say that this pronouncement of judgment comes only at the time of the final judgment at the end of the world contradicts Scripture. No one needs to wait until the last day to know God's verdict; he receives it at the instant of death. Death also at once places his soul into either heaven or hell; the verdict is executed at once. To think of anything else erases the correspondence with Christ's death, for he does not wait until the last day to learn God's judgment regarding his sacrifice.⁵

I also like the way the Expositor's puts it, as it quotes Vaughan: “Man dies once, and the next thing before him is judgment. So Christ died once and the next thing before Him is the Advent.”⁶

We also should comment on τοῦτο κρίσις. This seems to be the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word . It doesn't necessarily mean “condemnation,” but it seems to mean the whole sphere of “judging,”—obtaining evidence and weighing it, making a decision and pronouncing a verdict—either guilty or innocent. In usage its meaning seems to be determined by the context.⁷

Heb. 9:28

Οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ προσενεχθεὶς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνενεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας, ἐκ δευτέρου χωπὶς ἁμαρτίας οφθησεται τοῖς αὐτὸν ἀπεκδεχομένοις εἰς σωτηρίαν.

NIV-so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

⁵ Page 319, Lenski.

⁶ Page 340, Expositor's.

⁷ Seminary Class Notes.

Lit.- in this manner Christ once offered to bear the sins of many, a second time without sin will appear to those awaiting him eagerly for salvation.

We now have the truth that was expressed in verse 27 applied to Christ and his work. “Once offered” of verse 28 corresponds to the “once to die” of verse 27. Just as people die once, so Christ, the Anointed One (Is. 61:1), was offered once. Jesus was offered to lift up and take away the sins of many as our Substitute (cf. “in our behalf,” v. 24) and as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29).

“The sins of many” is not referring to a limited atonement. There is no contradiction between this verse and all the others that clearly reference a universal atonement, such as 2 Cor. 5, 14,19: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” “Many” is used to simply show the contrast with the “One” who bore our sins. The word “many” is used here in the same sense as in Rom. 5:19, *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*

When it comes to Christ, however, judgment does not follow death. Instead, he will appear a second time “without sin.” Sin has been removed by his sacrifice. This sin is now gone! He will appear to those who keep waiting until “the expected actually appears.”⁸

⁸ Page 321, Lenski.