

Chapter 9

Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people - the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing; which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood; for when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Commentary

As the author continued his contrasts between the Old and New Covenants, he built on his declaration that the old is decayed, ancient and passing away completely. Having compared the Aaronic priests to Christ, the final high priest, and having shown that the New Covenant was part and parcel of the promises that defined the Hebrew people, he moved on into one of the most revered places in their history - the Tabernacle in the Wilderness.

While Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai, God gave him very exacting plans for building this tent. It was to have a specific length and height, color, configuration, decoration, and furniture. Every piece had a specific purpose for the ministry of the Levites before the Almighty. But, they prefigured elements of Christ's ministry to come. So, the author began by listing the pieces of furniture, each vitally important under the Old Covenant, but each passing into uselessness in the New.

{1} - Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

Even in the old, or first, covenant there was a blending of the spiritual and the natural. The Levites rendered service to the divine presence and they moved about in the tabernacle that typified the heavenly realm. But, they performed their service in an actual, literal tent that rested here on earth, camped among worldly men. The "tent of meeting" was a physical, worldly locale inside which the spiritual presence of God dwelt.

{2} - For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called the sanctuary.

There was an outer area and a small "inner chamber" within the walls of the tabernacle. A golden candlestick that had seven lamps lighted the outer court (Exod.25:37). It had a central stem with three branches out either side. It's what has come to be called a "menorah" in Jewish temples and homes.

Interestingly, these candlesticks appear in the book of Revelation. After John was caught up in the spirit and heard Christ's voice,

“I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.” (Rev.1:12-13)

Later, in verse 20, Christ defined the symbol of the candlesticks –

“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks; the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” (Rev. 1:20)

So, in simplest terms, even back at the tabernacle in the wilderness, the Church was prefigured, shining light in the place where men served, and met with, God.

Just north of the lamp stand was a golden table with bread on it. The priests were required to change the bread each Sabbath (1Chron.9:32). The table was set with golden spoons, dishes, bowls and covers. And, the bread was to be set before God continually. The priests ate this bread after it was removed from the table and replaced with hot bread (1Sam.21:6, Mat. 12:4).

The bread that was continually before God was a type of Christ, who is nourishment to the people who are sanctified, or "set apart," for His service. The showbread was placed before God on a table of gold, the symbol of perfection, laid on a blue cloth, the color of eternity.

Those pieces of furniture (along with a laver for cleansing, not mentioned by the author) were in the outer court where the priests served. This area was called the sanctuary.

{3} - And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

To enter the tabernacle the priests had to pass through a veil that covered the only entrance. But, inside the tabernacle was a smaller room, which was called the "Holy of Holies", or the Holiest Place of all.

{4} - Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

The golden censer was an altar dedicated to burning incense (Ex.30:1). It was of pure gold and was never to be touched by men. Every morning and evening when Aaron would light the lamps he would burn incense on this altar. No burnt

sacrifices or drink offerings were to be on it, it was strictly for incense; and, not just any old type of incense, either. God gave Moses particular instructions for creating an aroma that was sweet to God's nostrils.

When the high priest would offer the yearly atonement, the blood of the sin offering was placed on the horns of this altar. The incense was to burn continually, "a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations" (Ex.30:8).

Once, two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered a different mixture of incense to God. For that act of presumption, God burned them to the ground (Lev. 10:1,2). It was this same incense that Aaron used to divide between the living and the dead, stopping the plague when God killed 14,700 people because of Korah's sin (Num. 16:46-48). Later in Israel's history, Uzziah the king thought to burn incense before God, but 80 Levite priest withstood him. Uzziah was angry at their insistence that he was not consecrated to do such thing, and even as he stood there fuming, leprosy came up on his skin. He died a leper (2 Chron.26: 16-21). So, this was a very particular, very important, ordinance.

The Heavenly counterpart of this altar is found in the book of Revelation –

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.” (Rev. 8:3-4)

So, the incense typified prayers ascending to God, burning on the altar of sacrifice, cleansed with the blood of the atonement, ascending to as a sweet savor to God.

The ark, itself, was a wooden box overlaid with pure gold. It was sealed with a "mercy seat of pure gold" (Exod.25:27), which had two cherubim with outstretched, joined wings overshadowing the mercy seat. It was on this mercy seat that the blood of the sin offering was poured once a year. And, when God appeared in the smoky cloud, He rested on the mercy seat between the angel wings.

Inside the ark was a golden cup, or pot, which had one "omer" full of manna (Exod.16:33). The term "manna" is loosely translated "what is it?" because the Israelites did not know what to call it when it first appeared on the ground (Exod.16:15). It was the food God provided for the forty-year journey through the wilderness. It was the sustenance of God's chosen people in order to get them all the way to the Promised Land.

Meanwhile, in the New Testament, when the Pharisees were questioning Jesus, they asked Him,

“What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” (John 6:30-31)

At that point, Jesus not only corrected their theology, but interpreted the symbol of the manna –

“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:32-35)

Also in the ark was Aaron's rod, or walking stick. This was the same stick that was thrown down before Pharaoh, becoming a snake, which swallowed the snake/rods of the magicians and became a stick, again (Exod.7:9-12). This was the rod that was stretched out over the waters of Egypt, turning them to blood (7:19). This was the rod that drew the plague of frogs out of the ponds and streams (8:5). This was the rod that struck the dust of Egypt and turned it into lice (8:16). This was also the rod that Moses stretched out over the Red Sea, parting the waters (Exod. 14:16).

While they were in the wilderness, in order to prove which tribe God had chosen to serve before Him, He instructed Moses to have the children of Israel each get a rod of their own and write the name of their tribe on it. Aaron's rod was to have the name "Levi" on it. After the twelve representative rods were gathered, they were to be laid in the tabernacle of the congregation where God would meet with Moses. Moses left the 12 sticks in the tabernacle overnight. In the morning, not only had Aaron's rod budded, but also it bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds (Num.17)!

The rod speaks of resurrection from the dead. And, the same powerful Spirit of God that performed the miracles leading to Israel's emancipation caused the dead stick to live again and be fruitful. It also speaks of God's sovereign right of election, choosing whom He will to serve and commune with Him.

The third article in the Ark of the Covenant was "the tables of the covenant". They have a rich history. God instructed Moses to come up on Mt. Sinai, saying,

“I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.” (Ex.24:12b)

But, while Moses was up with God, Aaron was at the base of the mountain, along with the children of Israel, constructing a golden calf. God commanded Moses to get down off the mount because the people were corrupting themselves (Exod.32:7). God spoke His mind to Moses, saying that He would consume the people and make of Moses a great nation. But, Moses stood as an intercessor between God and the sinners, saying -

“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.” (Ex. 32:13)

Reminded of the Abrahamic promise, the Lord turned from the destruction He had thought to do (Ex.32:10-14). As Moses descended the mount, he carried the two stone tablets that God had given him. This part's important –

“And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.” (Ex. 32:16)

Part way down the hill, Moses saw the people dancing around the golden calf. In his anger, he threw the tablets down at the base of the mount. Then, he melted the calf and ground it into powder. He mixed it into a soup and made the children of Israel eat their "god."

Next, Moses stood before the naked crowd and shouted, "Who is on the Lord's side?" The Levites gathered to him and he gave instructions for the Levites to slay the revelers. 3,000 died. The next day Moses decided to climb the hill again, saying -

“Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the Lord peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.” (Ex. 32:30)

God accepted Moses' plea for mercy, but He would plague them on account of the golden calf. Then, after giving instructions on how to move the people, and after causing the latter trail of His glory to pass by Moses, God gave instructions for two new tables of stone. This time God would not hew them, but Moses would cut two stones like the first (Ex. 34:1). After reciting the terms of the covenant He would make with Israel, God instructed Moses to write the words and they communed together forty days and nights. Moses wrote on the tables the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments (34:28).

Now, here's the point. Because of sin the first tables of stone, hewn and written by the hand of God, were broken - just as the first covenant of law was broken. But, the second tables, hewn and written by a man who acted as an intercessor and who approached God to make atonement, were kept perfectly intact - just as

the man Jesus kept the law perfectly and interceded on our behalf, making the perfect atonement. That's why the second tables were in the ark. The first covenant was broken, but the second remains.

So, we have these three articles - the intact law, the resurrected stick and the bread from Heaven. Interesting types, eh? And, they speak of the Trinity, as well. The law came from the Father, the Son is the bread and the Holy Spirit is the resurrecting power. All that was encased in this golden box that no man could touch.

{5} - *And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.*

Oh, don't you wish he had spoken particularly about them?

The "mercyseat" is called a "*kapporeth*", or covering. That is where the blood of the atonement for sin was spilled. It was the mediatorial place between the perfection of the Triune God within the box and the men who desperately needed mercy. Only the blood of a sacrifice could affect that redemption. It was the place where the glory of God descended from Heaven and communed with men.

Clearly, Christ fulfilled all those requirements. He is the blood; He is the covering; He is the atonement; He is the sacrifice; He is the glory of God who descended from Heaven to mediate between God and men.

{6} - *Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.*

So, once God laid out the details of this plan, the furniture was built and the tabernacle erected, the Levites were able to go into the outer court, through the first veil, where no common folk could venture. They could serve God every day in that capacity.

{7} - *But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:*

As we've observed earlier, only the high priest ever entered the second veil into the holiest place, where the ark and the censer/altar were. Each Feast of Atonement he would enter with the sacrificial blood. But, importantly, he was as much in need of forgiveness as the people were. He was a sinner sacrificing innocent animals on behalf of sinners.

{8} - The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing;

As long as that first tabernacle stood, with the attendant regulations and priests who served in it, the holiest place was off-limits to everyone, every day, all the time. Only the high priest had an entrance, only once a year. Otherwise, no one was allowed to approach the presence of God.

The author found a significant message from the Holy Ghost in these facts. The way to enter the Holiest Place, to stand undefiled before God Almighty, to appear in Heaven before the Majesty Supreme, was not laid out – “made manifest” – under the Mosaic covenant. As long as that tabernacle stood and that mode of worship and legal obedience was in place, the true pathway to glory and eternal acceptance remained hidden.

{9} - Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

The tabernacle in the wilderness was type, a foreshadow – “a figure for the time then present” – pointing to eternal truths. But, even at it’s best, it remained merely a type. It was never a method through which men would find lasting peace with God. The gifts and bloody sacrifices could never perfect the conscience of the men who served in the tabernacle. The very fact that they had to continue year after year, bloody animal after bloody animal, demonstrated the fact that their sins were never finally cleansed.

{10} - Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

It was simply repetition of fleshly rules, but it never accomplished the one thing men needed most - true forgiveness. They ate sanctified animals, they washed over and over in the laver of cleansing, they could perform perfectly every aspect of the regulations pertaining to the tabernacle, but it was a system doomed to failure. Still, it was never a system meant to accomplish redemption. It was designed to lead men to the only true means of salvation - Christ, Himself.

And, that's the author's point. These rules were imposed on Israel, under penalty of plague and death, until the time when God would bring it to an end and "reform" His agreement with His people. He would establish a New Covenant, through Christ, who would rip open the earthly veil and ascend triumphantly into the true “holiest place” that the physical tent pictured.

{ 11 } - But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

The phrase "But, Christ..." that opens this section indicates that a contrast is being developed. The first contrast the author posed is a "time" contrast. The Old Covenant - with its attendant religious ceremonies, laws, sacrifices, ordinances, clean and unclean foods, perpetual washings, and rules concerning the flesh - stood "for the time then present." But, they were imposed on Israel "until the time of reformation." Here in verse eleven, Christ is described as a high priest concerning "good things to come," an obvious reference to that reformation.

The old manner of worship and sacrifice was done away with when God "reformed" the methodology, sending His Son to complete the high priest typology. The trappings and furniture of the Levitical system pointed forward to a time to come when Christ would fulfill them, and render them useless.

The second contrast is between the tent where the priests served and the blood was shed and "a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands." Although the earthly tabernacle was designed in accordance with God's plans, it was erected with human hands. Each piece was made according to God's detail, but the work was wrought by chosen men.

On the other hand, Christ served (and serves) in the true tabernacle of God, which the former one foreshadowed. The description of it as "greater" indicates more than just size, but speaks to the superiority of the Heavenly place of meeting. This is not merely a place where carnal men meet with a pillar of smoke. It is the place where the perfect Son of God brought his eternal sacrifice to once-and-for-all expiate the sins of His people. This is where the Father of Lights meets with the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

{ 12 } - Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

The third contrast is between the value of the sacrifices, themselves. Later in this chapter, and in Chapter Ten, the author is going to develop the logic that demonstrated the complete ineffectiveness of "the blood of goats and calves." The essence of his argument was, "They [the priests] can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect" (Heb. 10:1). And, that's the root of the whole deal, isn't it?

God is perfect. The Bible states that over and over. God does not change and He has arrayed Himself in glory, holiness and righteousness. Meanwhile, our most pressing need is to approach, and be accepted by, this glorious One. But, the Old Covenant system failed in that respect. And really, it doesn't matter what else we can say to commend it, if it fails to get us to God, it is of no value whatsoever.

We may say that following the law creates a good society, or reduces the incidence of crime. We can say that it exercises the intellect, or helps us keep our flesh under submission. It may give us bragging rights when we gather with others who are attempting to maintain the same standard. But, if the system of bloody animals and carnal ordinances cannot guarantee our eternal security, then what's the point?

So, there had to be a new, better system. There had to be a superior sacrifice designed to accomplish a complete redemption. Goat blood wasn't getting it. Cow blood was of no lasting value. Dead birds and grain offerings failed to attain genuine reconciliation. A blood of infinite value had to be found.

Fortunately (!), God provided just a sacrifice. How? Well, as Abraham told Isaac —

“My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.”
(Gen.22:8)

God didn't just provide a lamb, He provided Himself as the lamb. The blood of God coursed through the veins of Jesus of Nazareth, born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, not taking part in the sinful bloodstream that was contaminated by Adam.

Now think about that for a moment.

We have a problem these days with something called "self esteem". I often tell people that there is nothing within ourselves that deserves our esteem. And, the longer we gaze into our navels searching for some modicum of good to reassure ourselves that we're worth something, the more destitute an honest person will become, discovering the wickedness that inhabits us all. In simple terms,

“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.”
(Rom.7:18a)

Or, in Jeremiah's words,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer.17:9)

But, a believer's worth is not determined by their intrinsic, fleshly value. The value of anything is determined by the price paid for it. For instance, I have a very low opinion of most modern art. An enormous, stark-white canvas with a red dot in the middle of it is a waste of space, as far as I'm concerned. But, if a person pays \$20,000 for that canvas, then what is that canvas worth (regardless of my opinion)? It's worth \$20,000! The price paid determines the value.

Now, believer in Christ, let me ask you a question. What are you worth? How high a price was paid to purchase you? "For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20).

God paid the highest price for you He ever paid for anything. He gave His very best, His most prized possession, to redeem you. He gave His Son. How high a price did the Son pay for you? He gave His back to the whip, He gave his brow to the thorns, His face to the tormentors, His hands and feet to the nails, His side to the spear, and the blood of God spilled to the ground. He endured separation, humiliation and the wrath of His Father. He raged war in the depths of the earth and defeated your two worst enemies, death and hell.

He gave the highest price ever paid for anything, ever.

So, returning to the "self esteem" question, there is nothing in us of any value that deserves the esteem of men, or the love of self. BUT --- our value in the eyes of our gracious God is infinite, having purchased us with the most valuable asset Christ had –

"...by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

So, we need to raise our eyes and look up to the one who loved us enough to die for us, though we were altogether unlovable. We need to hold Him in high esteem, and find our value in the fact that He so graciously elected us, brought us to Himself and guaranteed our entrance and eternal acceptance.

By the way, before we move on, I love the phrase "eternal redemption." Not only does that indicate that it is a single, solitary action with nonstop consequences, never having to be repeated; but it is a surety, an unconditional guarantee, that we will be successfully delivered to our eternal inheritance. No trespass I commit today, no fear I have tomorrow, no pit of despair or guilt, and no perceived lack of worthiness can thwart the "eternal redemption" - because it's not in me. It is in Him.

Again, look upward, not inward.

So, "he entered in once into the holy place." Into the Heavenly "holy of holies" went our high priest with His price of "eternal redemption."

Once. That's the key - just once. The price paid was so complete that it will remain efficacious throughout the eons of forever. One payment of the blood of Christ was deposited to guarantee the eternal purchase of His beloved.

{13,14} - For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Before the high priest could enter the tabernacle he had to be ceremonially cleansed. In order for the flesh of any man to stand before God and not die, that flesh had to be "sprinkled" in a specific way. Sacrificial blood had to be on his garments. Ram's blood had to be on his right ear, right thumb, and right toe. The ashes of a spotless red heifer had to be sprinkled on the furniture, the walls, and the priests. "It is a purification for sin" (Num.19:9).

So, the author asks, if these earthly elements were capable of rendering an unclean man "sanctified" in the flesh when he stood before God, how much more effective is the blood of Christ?

But, notice the effect. Our conscience is to be changed. From what? From the list he gave back in verse eleven - "as pertaining to the conscience, which stood only in the meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances." These were the activities of the priests, in particular, and everyone who looked to the Sinaitic Law for their justification.

But, we no longer look to our own works, or the activities dictated by the law of Sinai, for our justification. The blood of Christ has delivered us, mind and body, from the letter of the law that could only condemn, into the perfect freedom that comes through faith in Christ.

After all, how could the continuation of dead animals, dead works, and the "motions of sins, which were by the law, (that) did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7:5) ever serve a living God? Only works of life, true worship in the Spirit of Life, and a conscience that is purged from dead works can ever genuinely serve the God in whom all life exists.

Our works are dead works. The works of the Levitical priests all encompassed death and bloodshed. But, God is alive and Christ is raised to live evermore. So, everyone who is indwelt by the Spirit of Life is delivered from that covenant of death into the New Covenant of life eternal.

{15} - And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Now we are venturing into the very core of profound Christian basics - the central event around which all Scripture revolves. Before the worlds began, God prepared a sacrifice, a Lamb slain, which would be of such infinite value that it would wholly and completely satisfy the righteousness, the holiness, the justice, and the standard of God. As we saw in verse 14, that price was the death of the Very Son of God, without spot or blemish. His shed blood was the final, complete payment for sin that would close the breach between the perfection of God and the wretched state of men. Without that single event, there is no reconciliation, no forgiveness, and no excuses.

Back at Mt. Sinai, God laid out a covenant agreement that demanded perfect obedience. Being naturally rebellious humans, the recipients of that covenant failed to live up to it even as Moses was receiving it. The Sinaitic covenant was full of a blessing for those that obeyed, and curses for those who disobeyed. But it was powerless to help anyone live up to its rules, nor could it bend in the slightest to encourage folk to keep trying.

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10)

In the end, all the law could do was condemn the world and hold it guilty (Rom. 3:19). Of necessity, there had to be a new, better agreement made if anyone was to have hope of eternal life. But, the new solution could not in anyway diminish the holiness, righteousness or perfection of God's character or law. Those attributes had to remain intact - yet be fully satisfied. That is why only God could devise a means to accomplish salvation. Only God could satisfy God.

So, Christ became the "lamb slain", the perfect sacrifice, the eternal satisfaction.

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament ...

Jesus is the single man, the only Being, who stands between God and sinners, able to reconcile their differences and mediate their agreement. It is a "new" agreement, wholly separate and distinct from the former one. It is neither dependant on, nor established by, the previous covenant. The "new" deal offers something the old covenant could never proffer --- hope.

And, it is an interesting term the KJV translators chose: "testament." In our lifetime we are allowed only one occasion when we may freely express our desires concerning our earthly inheritance - our "Last Will and Testament."

Before we leave this earth we get to spell out every detail of our estate and how we want it divided. Plus, we can put provisions on how it is dispersed. We can designate our heirs and leave instructions concerning the conditions under which they will get our stuff. That's what a "will" is all about. It is how we "will" that our estate be used. And, we testify one last time about our beliefs, our dedications, or our firm convictions. That is what a "testament" is.

So likewise, Christ was the mediator, or go-between, of this new statement concerning His inheritance and how it would be divided up. The "New Testament" is a new declaration of the beliefs and convictions of those who follow the testator - or, truth proclaimer - Christ.

... that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament...

In this short phrase we find one of the fundamental differences between the old and new covenants. The first declared everyone to be guilty. But, the second offered redemption for the guilt established by the first one.

The Greek word translated "redemption" is "*exagorazo*," meaning "to buy out." It had the particular implication of buying a slave in order to set him free. The Greek word "*lutro*," translated "to redeem," means, "to release in receipt of ransom" with the emphasis on the actual release of the slave, since his price was paid. The descendants of Adam were all bondslaves to sin and only the sacrifice of one whose blood was worth enough could purchase the guilty sinners and set them free!

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:23,24)

... (that by means of death) they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

That's what it took to bring sinners to Heaven - the death of the only perfect One. But, having established His right to do what He will with His own, He calls those He purchased and indwells them with His Spirit, giving them hope of salvation, promising them a share of His inheritance.

{ 16,17 } - For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

You and I may keep our wills locked away in a safe deposit box, but no one can lay claim to any of our stuff so long as we are alive. Likewise, even as Christ preached the kingdom and spoke of eternal things, everything He had was wrapped up in Himself as long as He walked the earth. The Old Testament was in force up until Jesus drew His last breath and relinquished His spirit to His Father.

What a brutal, bloody event it was. Blood seeped down His thorn-pierced brow. Blood drained from his scourged back. Blood ran from his nail-cleft hands and feet. Blood and water poured from the gash in His side. Yet, it was this very blood that ushered in the era of grace and forgiveness.

But, at that instant everything changed. While the change may have been imperceptible to the inhabitants of earth, in Heaven there was a cataclysmic shift from the old to the new. No longer would God look on His children in judgment. His grace had a new and efficacious avenue. The blood was spilled, the judgment was poured out, the wrath was emptied, and the holiness was satisfied.

Thus, we who come to God in Christ no longer approach in fear. We are "bought with a price." We are His cherished possession, accepted in the beloved. By means of His singular death, the New Testament of grace and mercy, help and kindness, hope and surety has been established and it will reign in us all the way to eternity.

{ 18 } - Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

To the Hebrew audience who received this letter, the death of animals was a commonplace part of their religion. Blood ran continually from the Tabernacle. Every high day, every Sabbath day, every Feast, every minor rebellion or accidental uncleanness required bloody sacrifices. And, every piece of furniture, every piece of cutlery, every candle, every pot and every plate, was sanctified with blood.

Just as the New Testament went into effect and was, in essence, "dedicated" by Christ's blood, the first covenant also had blood as part of its rites of dedication. The bloody animals all led up to the ultimate bloody sacrifice. But, any practicing Hebrew would have known that blood was an absolute requirement for atonement, old or new.

{ 19,20 } - For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and

all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

That event was recorded in Exodus 24 –

“And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.” (Ex. 24:5-8)

Both the old and the new testament were established when sacrificial blood was poured out on behalf of the people who were covered by that covenant. In fact, it was very literally splashed over the people as they heard the terms of the first covenant read to them.

{21} - Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

As previously mentioned, everything in the tabernacle was sprinkled. Nothing could be brought into the tabernacle or used in service to God if it had not been spattered with innocent blood.

{22} - And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

In the books of Exodus and Leviticus there are (get this!) 115 references to blood. The vast majorities have to do with ceremonial blood. Ceremonial blood is always the blood of a spotless animal sacrificed vicariously for the purification of the instruments and people of God.

And, in accordance with the law, sins could be temporarily remitted, set aside, or overlooked when God received sacrifices that pleased Him. But, without blood - without proper, satisfactory, in-accordance-with-the-regulations-type blood - there was no hope of remission. Only judgment awaited the sinner. Only wrath loomed in his future. Only separation and certain destruction were his guaranteed lot.

Unless there was blood ---

Really, really valuable blood.

{23} - It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The old covenant furniture and priesthood were merely earthly shadows of Heavenly realities. But, the blood of sheep, goats, pigeons and oxen were hardly sufficient collateral upon which to found the newer, higher, better testament. The superior covenant demanded a superior sacrifice.

{24} - For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Jesus, though a high priest, never validated the Aaronic priesthood by entering into the earthly "holy of holies," despite His frequent visits to the Jerusalem temple. And, significantly, after His death He did not take His ultimate sacrifice into the earthly "holiest place." Instead, the veil of that place was torn open, signifying that the earthly priesthood was no longer necessary and the way to God was opened to all. The earthly tabernacle and "holy place" were simply "figures" designed to teach us about the true Heaven, the single sacrifice and the genuine "lamb of God." Christ ascended up into Heaven and appeared before God's throne (not the cloud of His presence which yearly appeared to the high priest) to establish His covenant of grace and peace.

But, I really like the last two words, "for us." Christ had always been in the presence of the Father. He was always beloved. It was not necessary for Him to suffer His Father's wrath in order for Him to be accepted back into Heaven. He was an eternal resident. But, we were without passage into glory. We needed someone to pave the way. We needed someone to exercise dominion on our behalf. We needed someone to perform an act of such heroism, such self-denial, such genuine value, that the Father would accept us on account of our Captain's service.

That is what Christ did. He sacrificed Himself vicariously and appeared before God "for us"!!!

{25} - Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

The value of Christ's atonement was so high that it accomplished its purpose wholly and completely. Unlike the constant stream of animal blood that poured from the Old Covenant altar, the New Covenant sacrifice was sufficient to be performed once and once only.

{26a} - For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world...

This was the author's substantive proof that Christ's blood was of infinite value. The very fact that God ordained to have it occur only once in human history ends any debate as to whether it was completely effective. If God had created the world, breathed into Adam and then immediately sacrificed Christ when Adam fell, then it would have been obvious that Christ needed to be killed every time anyone anywhere sinned. But, each instance of His death would only be sufficient to cover that particular grievance.

{26b} - ... but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Christ's sacrifice occurred only once. And, that occurrence "put away sin." It did not just cover a few mishaps or clean up the stain of an occasional lapse of reason. It did away with our sin problem utterly and completely.

Pardon me while I camp here for a moment.

Yes, we are still sinners, and yes we still sin. We still trespass against our brethren and commit offenses before God. Once upon a time, each and every one of those offenses would have required an animal to die. But, the promise now is that every one of our debts is covered by Christ's single payment. He knew the weight and the gravity of our sin when He submitted to bear it for us. He knew we'd fail time and again, but He paid a price sufficient to cover us time and again.

Our single biggest dilemma, when it came to approaching God, was the fact that we were terminally unclean and He was gloriously holy. That was our "sin problem." The sin that courses through our veins had rendered us not only incapable of pleasing God, but also incapable of preventing our own demise. Each of us grows old, grows sick and dies. Those are "the wages of sin."

But, so complete was the payment that not only our spiritual inadequacy, but also our physical inability, has been cured. No part of us, the elect creation of God, will remain unaffected by the atonement. Our spirits will depart from our earthly tents to rise into Heaven when we die. But, one day our very bodies will be resurrected from the grave, being made like the Heavenly flesh of Christ, which is at home cooking fish for earthly men (John 21:9), and equally at home sitting on the throne of eternal Sovereignty.

The blood sacrifice, done once, is so complete that it will utterly defeat and reverse every detriment and curse that the reign of sin accomplished against us.

Christ's sacrifice of Himself did not just "patch up" our sin problem, it put it away forever!

Okay, I'm breaking camp. However, I want to take a moment to address the phrase, "but now once in the end of the world..."

This is not an eschatological statement. If it were, and we took it to mean that Christ's sacrifice signaled the cataclysmic end of the world as we know it, then the last 2000 years are an enigma to Scripture. The phrase, "in the end of the world" is in contrast to the phrase "since the foundation of the world:" which starts this verse.

The author's point was that the death of Christ would have been repeated continuously from the very start of man's existence if it were only as adequate as the animal sacrifices. But, since it only occurred once, after roughly 4,000 years of written history, it must be of far greater value. The author was writing at the culmination of history to that point and contrasting his time to the very beginning of time - "since the foundation of the world."

Besides, in a couple verses the author is going to recite the hope of a future return of Christ - future to him and future to us. So, with that bit of prophecy still pending, certainly the author was not declaring that the world had somehow "ended" prior to Christ's return.

{27} - And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

This verse elucidates one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Every man gets one shot at this earth thing. Many Eastern religions teach that men will have multiple terrestrial lives in order to work off their guilt, or karma, and will one day live a life where they will discover the key to stopping this circle of reincarnation and move on into Nirvana. But, Christianity declares just the opposite. We live once and take our guilt with us when we stand before the eternal judge.

[My friend in Los Angeles subscribed to Eastern philosophies and he thought that Western Christian thought was too dogmatic. He had a bumper sticker that read: "My Karma Just Ran Over Your Dogma." Think about it --- you'll laugh later.]

The author was pointing out, however, that Christ was completely human in His incarnation. As such, He was subject to death, but only once. Thus, it was impossible to imagine Him dying repeatedly for multiple sins. His singular death had to be sufficient to accomplish everything it was intended to accomplish.

{28} - So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

So, in keeping with the death all humans throughout time, Christ died once, but He died as the sacrifice for many.

How many?

Well, as many as He died for!

Just as the high priest of Israel carried the weight of the twelve tribes on his shoulders, but had them engraved in gold over his heart (Exod.28), Christ carried His people's sins into the Holiest Place in Heaven and laid down the sacrifice that would complete their purchase and perfection.

Just as the high priest of Israel was a priest to particular people (i.e. he was not sacrificing for the sins of the Hittites, Hivites, or Jebusites), so our High Priest performed the sacrifice of Himself for His particular people.

And, there is the promise of a future return I alluded to a moment ago. He will return to get His people, resurrect His "body of believers," and take His redeemed to the place He has prepared for them.

Does that promise include the whole world? No, it is reserved for those "who look for him." And, who will be looking?

The redeemed - the bride who is anticipating the arrival of her husband to take her into His home to live as one!

Look up, saints! "And lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."
(Luke 21:28)

What a promise! What a blessed hope!