

16. Understanding Why the Old Testament Priesthood Was Like a Shadow

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why Christ is our Great High Priest. We saw that Christ only had to offer Himself once as a sacrifice because He was without sin. In this topic we will see that the Old Testament tabernacle and priests are compared to a shadow. If we hold an object in front of a light in a dark room, we can see the shadow on the wall. The shadow is not the real object but just a shadow of the object. In the same way the Old Testament priests were just a shadow of Christ who is the true High Priest.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God promised to make a new covenant with Israel and Judah. Those verses say, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” This new covenant with Israel and Judah is explained much more fully in chapters 8, 9 and 10 of Hebrews. As a result, we will have many references to the new covenant in these chapters.

Hebrews 8:1-2 says, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” In the previous chapters we have seen that Christ is greater than any high priest from the family of Aaron. Now we come to the main point. Here we see that Christ is a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavens. The high priests in the Old Testament only went into the Holy of Holies one day a year. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father at all times. There He is speaking to the Father for all believers including both Jews and Gentiles.

We see that Christ is the Minister of the sanctuary which is the true tabernacle. The Old Testament tabernacle was just like a shadow of the true tabernacle that is eternal in the heavens. In the Old Testament tabernacle God met the high priest at the mercy seat that was on the top of the Ark of the Covenant. Inside that ark were the Ten Commandments. On top of that ark was the mercy seat where the high priest put blood first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. On the morning of the resurrection Christ said to Mary in John 20:17, “Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" The first thing Christ did after He talked to Mary was to go to the Father to present His own blood as the blood of the New Covenant to the Father as the eternal offering for sin. Later that day He appeared to His disciples.

Christ went to the true sanctuary to present His blood instead of the tabernacle that was just a

Growing Godly Family Series – Learning to Minister from the Old Testament 16. “Understanding Why the Old Testament Priesthood Was Like a Shadow”

Updated July 2023

Copyright © 2007, Duane L. Anderson, American Indian Bible Institute; 2022, DLA, Serve and Equip
Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This resource is available from and distributed free of charge by Serve and Equip <https://sveq.org>
ANY REPRODUCTION OF MATERIAL FOR RESALE OR PROFIT IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED

shadow of the true tabernacle. God told Moses in Exodus 25:9, “According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.” Since the Old Testament tabernacle, sacrifices and priests were all a shadow of the true sanctuary, Moses was to make them according to the pattern that God told him so that they could be a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. As a result, Christ went to the Father to present His blood.

Hebrews 8:3-5 goes on to say, “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”” Here we see that throughout the Old Testament the high priests offered both gifts and sacrifices. As a result, it was necessary for Christ to also have something to offer. Instead of offering the blood of animal sacrifices as the priests in the Old Testament did, Christ offered His own blood to the Father.

If Christ would have tried to offer His own blood in the temple in Jerusalem, He did not qualify as a priest under the Old Covenant. The priests that offered their sacrifices in the tabernacle and later in the temple had to be from the family of Aaron. They had to offer those sacrifices according to the instructions of the Old Testament law. Christ was not from the family of Aaron and as we have seen that was why He had to be a greater priest than Aaron. He had to be after the order of Melchizedek instead. Instead of offering His blood in the tabernacle on earth, Christ had to offer His blood in the true tabernacle.

The Old Testament tabernacle had to be built according to the pattern that God had shown Moses on the mountain. Exodus 25:40 says, “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” Then, Exodus 39:42-43 says, “According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did all the work. Then, Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them.” The priests also had to offer their sacrifices and gifts according to the law. The book of Leviticus gave very exact instructions about the way to offer the various sacrifices.

In spite of the fact that the Old Testament priests had to offer the sacrifices exactly as God had said, Hebrews 9:9-10 says, “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.” Those gifts and sacrifices could never make the priest who offered them perfect. That was due to the fact that those were only imposed until the time of reformation. As a result, the Old Testament gifts and sacrifices only pointed forward to the time when Christ would come and take away sin.

That is why the priests who offered gifts and sacrifices under the Old Testament law were actually giving a copy and shadow of the heavenly sacrifice that Christ presented to the Father when He

Growing Godly Family Series – Learning to Minister from the Old Testament 16. “Understanding Why the Old Testament Priesthood Was Like a Shadow”

Updated July 2023

Copyright © 2007, Duane L. Anderson, American Indian Bible Institute; 2022, DLA, Serve and Equip

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This resource is available from and distributed free of charge by Serve and Equip <https://sveq.org>

ANY REPRODUCTION OF MATERIAL FOR RESALE OR PROFIT IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED

presented His sacrifice once for all after His resurrection. Those sacrifices never made people perfect and so they could never give a person true liberty. Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Christ is the One who gives that true liberty because His payment took away sin and did not just cover sin. We will see in our next topic that when the Jews recognize the new covenant that Christ provided that they will also experience that liberty.

That is why Hebrews 8:6 says, “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” Christ has a much better ministry than any of the Old Testament priests. The word translated “more excellent” means something that differs and surpasses the ministry of the Old Testament priests. Hebrews 1:4 says, “Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” In this verse, the word is used to point out that the ministry of Christ differed from and surpassed the ministry of angels. As a result, Christ has a much greater ministry than any person or created being because of the fact that He is the Creator.

We also see that Christ is the Mediator of a better covenant. Hebrews 10:14 says, “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” We see that the offering Christ offered made it possible for us to stand before the Father because we stand in the righteousness of Christ instead of our own righteousness. 1 John 2:1-2 says, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” When Satan accuses us as Christians of sin, Christ as our Advocate says, “I paid for (insert your own name) sins and (insert your own name) accepted that payment by repenting of his or her sin of unbelief and placing his faith in the fact that my blood paid for his sin.” The Father responds by saying, “I am satisfied with the payment. Case dismissed.” Here we see that salvation is based only on what Christ did and the fact that the Father is satisfied.

The final thing that we see is that the new covenant is based on better promises. The Old Covenant could only produce death because it showed that all people are guilty of sin and the blood of animals could never take away that sin. In contrast, the New Covenant provides eternal life to all who believe because the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made to take away our sins. The Old Covenant was given through Moses and showed that all people are guilty. In contrast, we see that John 1:17 says, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Here we see that Christ provided a New Covenant based on grace and truth. As we help our physical and spiritual children understand the New Covenant, it will help them to realize and be able to explain to others the greatness of the New Covenant. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain to others why the Old Testament priesthood is like a shadow but that Christ is our Great High Priest.