

Christ *in the* Heavenly Sanctuary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:3, John 1:29, Rev. 5:12, Heb. 7:1–28, 9:11–15, Lev. 16:13, Heb. 9:20–23.*

Memory Text: “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (*Philippians 2:9, 10, NIV*).

Talking about Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, the book of Hebrews says: “where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (*Heb. 6:20, NKJV*).

Scripture, especially the New Testament, is so clear about Christ's role as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary—a role He took after He completed His work as our sacrifice here on earth (*see Heb. 10:12*).

This week we will explore the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. His intercessory work is crucial to the preparation of His people to be ready for the end time. So, we have been given this crucial admonition: “The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

What is Christ doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary, and why is it so important for us to understand it, especially in the last days?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 5.

Supreme Sacrifice

Studying the supreme sacrifice of Christ does so much to prepare believers for the end time. Often humans look to the goal ahead of them, and that makes sense. But it is also good to realize that the goal is behind them. We speak of Calvary. The goal, reached here by Jesus for us, is irreversible and final, and it gives certainty to the goal ahead, as well.

Read Romans 8:3, 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16, and 1 Corinthians 15:53. Why did God send His Son into the world?

God sent Christ to be a sin offering in order to condemn sin in the flesh. What does this mean? As an immortal Being, Christ could not die. Therefore, the Lord became a human, taking our mortality upon Himself so that He could die as our substitute.

Although divine, and although in nature God, Jesus took on “human likeness,” and He humbled Himself “by becoming obedient to death” on the cross (*Phil. 2:6–8, NIV*). In a way known only to God, the divinity of Christ did not die when Jesus died on the cross. In some way beyond human comprehension, the divinity of Jesus was quiescent during the nine months in the womb and in the days in the tomb, and Jesus never used it to aid His humanity during His life and ministry here.

Read Luke 9:22. What does this tell us about the intentionality of Christ’s death?

Christ was born to die. We can imagine that there was never a moment in eternity when He was free from thoughts of the mocking, the flogging, and the heartbreaking crucifixion that He would face. This is unparalleled love, never witnessed before and not fully understood.

What can we humans do in the face of this kind of love but fall down and worship in faith and obedience? What does the reality of the Cross tell us about the worthlessness of human merit?

The Lamb of God

Read John 1:29, Revelation 5:12, and 13:8. What is the one image that these texts have in common, and what is the importance of that image in helping us to understand the plan of salvation?

When John the Baptist called Jesus the “Lamb of God,” he was making an unmistakable reference to the sanctuary. Even more directly, he was making a reference to Christ’s death for sin as the one and only fulfillment of all the lambs (and every other sacrificial animal in the Hebrew sanctuary ritual) that had ever been slain as a sacrifice for sin. Indeed, the four Gospels, whatever else they teach, ultimately tell the story of what Jesus did in His role as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

But the story of Jesus and His work for our salvation does not end in the Gospels, even with His death and resurrection.

From the beginning, the book of Hebrews touches on the theme of Christ as the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary after His work as the sacrificial Lamb. From the first mention of Him in this role after the Cross (*Heb. 1:3*), succeeding chapters in the book make reference to Jesus as High Priest. The depiction of His work in the heavenly sanctuary is developed fully in detail in Hebrews 7:1–28.

Read Hebrews 7:1–28. What is the author saying here about Jesus?

Although these verses are so deep, so rich, the essence of what they are saying is that Jesus Christ has a better priesthood than did the priests from the line of Aaron in the earthly sanctuary service. But now, instead of an earthly priesthood in an earthly sanctuary, we have a heavenly High Priest ministering for us in the sanctuary in heaven. So when we focus our eyes on Jesus, we can focus them on Him as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Our High Priest

Read Hebrews 7:24–27, 8:6. What great hope do these texts give to us?

Christ is able to save completely because of several qualifications that no other priest could ever have. He is God, who has authority to forgive sins. He has a permanent priesthood. During the Christian era, He is interceding all the time for His people with the same loving compassion as when He healed the sick and comforted the lonely on earth. He is also human but was born sinless and remained that way. And, as the sinless One, He died under the staggering weight of the sum total of human sin. Only He, then, as the God-man, can intercede for sinners in heaven's sanctuary.

What these texts show, too, is that Christ's sacrifice was once and for all. It needed to happen only one time, and it was sufficient to bring salvation to every human being.

After all, considering who it was who died on the cross, how could such an offering not be sufficient for every human being?

Read Hebrews 9:11–15. What has Christ obtained for us through His death and now His ministry in heaven?

Hebrews 9:12 says that Christ has “obtained eternal redemption” (*NKJV*). The Greek word translated as “redemption” also means “ransoming,” “releasing,” and “deliverance.” It's the same word used in Luke 1:68, when Zacharias declares that God has “visited and redeemed His people” (*NKJV*). The reference to Christ's blood—the blood of the only sufficient sacrifice—means that it was Christ, as the sacrificial Lamb, who obtained this redemption, this deliverance. And the great news of the gospel is that Christ obtained this not for Himself but for us, and it becomes efficacious for all who accept Christ's sacrifice for them.

Dwell on the idea that Christ has “obtained” “eternal redemption” for us and that only after He accomplished this did He enter into His work in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. What hope does this offer us regarding what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary?

Our Intercessor

Although sin brought a fearful separation between God and humanity, through Christ's sacrificial death we as human beings are brought to God and can continue to have access to Him. *See Eph. 2:18, 1 Pet. 3:18.*

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (*Heb. 6:19, 20*). According to these verses, what has Jesus done for us?

Read Hebrews 9:24. What does this text say that Christ's work includes?

Jesus is the forerunner, having entered as our Representative into the heavenly sanctuary, even into the very presence of God *for us*. That is, Jesus is standing before the Father, ministering the merits of His atonement, the “eternal redemption” that He “obtained” in our behalf.

Yes, when we accepted Jesus our sins were forgiven, and we stood before God pardoned and cleansed. But the fact remains that even though we have become Christians, we at times still sin, despite all the wonderful promises of victory. In such cases, Jesus intercedes as our High Priest in heaven. He represents the repenting sinner, not pleading our merits (for we have none) but pleading His own on our behalf before the Father. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (*Heb. 7:25, NKJV*).

What born-again Christian does not sense his or her own need of Christ's continuing mercy and grace? That is, despite the new life we have in Jesus, despite the wonderful changes in our existence, who doesn't realize his or her own constant need of pardon and forgiveness? Why, then, is the knowledge of Christ as our High Priest so precious to us?

The Day of Atonement

The book of Hebrews teaches that the earthly Hebrew sanctuary service was a model of the heavenly sanctuary, the one that Christ entered and inaugurated as our High Priest. The earthly service, with its two apartments and its sacrificial and cleansing rituals, was “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle” (*Heb. 8:5, NKJV*).

And just as the earthly sanctuary ritual included a ministry in the two compartments, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, so also does Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. In the earthly sanctuary, the concept of judgment was represented on the Day of Atonement, which resulted in the cleansing of the sanctuary, as depicted in Leviticus 16. This was the one time a year when the High Priest entered into the second compartment, the Most Holy Place (*Lev. 16:12–14*), to do a work of cleansing and atonement on behalf of the people.

Read Hebrews 9:20–23. What needs to be purified and cleansed, and why is this a clear reference to the Day of Atonement ministry of Christ?

Scholars have been surprised by the statement that the heavenly sanctuary itself needed to be cleansed or “purified.” However, once this is understood as a Day of Atonement reference, the problem vanishes. Hebrews 9:23 shows that the work Christ does in the heavenly sanctuary is the true expression of what the earthly high priest did in the yearly Day of Atonement service in the Israelite sanctuary. The ministry of the earthly priest in cleansing the earthly sanctuary foreshadowed the work that Christ would do one day in the heavenly. The text does not say that this heavenly cleansing takes place immediately after Christ’s ascension. From the study of the book of Daniel, we can see that this phase of ministry began in the year 1844. So as Christians facing the last days, we need to understand the solemnity of the time that we are in but rest in the assurance of what Christ has done for us in the past and is doing for us now in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.

The first angel’s message declares: “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). The reality of the judgment points to the nearness of the end. How should this reality impact how we live?

Further Thought: The book of Hebrews points to the earthly sanctuary as the model, the type, of what Christ would do for us both on earth as our sacrifice and in heaven as our High Priest. The Israelite sanctuary was meant always to be an object lesson of the gospel. It was to teach the Jews the plan of salvation, which included sacrifice, intercession, judgment, and the final end of sin. The book of Daniel, meanwhile, adds more light in terms of helping readers to understand the apocalyptic (end time) dimension of Christ's final work in the heavenly sanctuary. "With its emphasis on cleansing, judgment, and vindication, the apocalyptic visions of Daniel project the imagery of the Day of Atonement to the very end of earth's history. The cleansing is connected directly to the heavenly sanctuary and to the work of the Messiah as king and priest. The visions introduce the time element, making it possible for the reader to identify a specific moment within salvation history when the Messiah would begin His work of final cleansing, judgment, and vindication in the heavenly dwelling of God."—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 394.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at this quote from Ellen G. White. "As anciently the sins of the people were by faith placed upon the sin offering and through its blood transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary, so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary. And as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 421, 422. What does she say are the two things that reveal those who are entitled to the "benefits of His atonement"? Why is it so important for God's people to grasp what these two things are, especially in the trials of the last days?
- ② Read Leviticus 16:15, 16. What is the significance of the blood? What did the blood represent? Why was the blood so crucial to the Day of Atonement ritual back then, and what does it mean for us today?

On Czech Television

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Irena Metzova doesn't know why she narrowly missed boarding a passenger jet that crashed into the Atlantic Ocean. But the sparing of her life allowed her to share the Sabbath on national television.

Irena had planned to fly from New York to her native Czech Republic after a summer of working as a volunteer cook for a group of student literature evangelists, including her college-age son. But the airline, KLM, suspended flights amid an industrial strike and rebooked her on a Swissair flight at the last minute. She alerted her sister in the Czech Republic about the change of plans, and the sister agreed to meet her at the Prague airport the next day.

In the morning, the sister woke up to the news that a Swissair DC-10 jet had crashed about two hours after takeoff from New York. It was her sister's plane.

In tears, she called Irena's husband. "I lost my sister. You lost your wife," she said.

But Irena hadn't taken the flight. When Irena approached the Swissair desk to check in for Flight 111 at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport, the Swissair representative said something that changed everything.

"Mrs. Metzova, you are Czech," the airline representative said. "We can put you on a direct flight from here to the Czech Republic on Czech Airlines. How would you like that?"

Irena liked the idea of not having to change planes in Geneva, and the airline representative printed her a new boarding pass.

"You have 15 minutes to catch the plane," the airline representative said. "Run!"

At 10:30 P.M. on September 2, 1998, the Swissair plane crashed off Canada's coast, killing all 229 people onboard, including a Seventh-day Adventist college student planning to study for a year in France. An in-flight fire was blamed for the tragedy.

As the world mourned, Irena's sister learned about the change in the itinerary.

Irena, now 68, can't explain what happened. But several years after the tragedy, she was given the opportunity to speak about her faith on Czech national television. On the television program, *Answered Prayers*, Irena told about God's goodness amid repressions in Communist-era Czechoslovakia.



She read the fourth commandment about the Sabbath.

Many people heard about the biblical seventh-day Sabbath for the first time, said her son, Kamil Metz, international coordinator for the Giving Light to Our World (GLOW) tracts ministry.

"After the program aired, other Adventists told us that their relatives had called them and said, 'We never knew that the Sabbath was in the Bible,'" he said.

All because Irena somehow missed a flight.