

# The First Covenant's Operations

Text: Hebrews 9:1-7

Date: 9-15-24

## I. The foundation of the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:1)

## II. The facets of the earthly sanctuary (Heb. 9:2-5) – shadow pieces

Within the Holy Place were the following sacred pieces:

- The **andlestick** or **lampstand** was made from a talent of pure gold and was used to illuminate the Holy Place. The lamp had 7 branches each with filled with olive oil. It stood on the left side when the priests entered the Holy Place.
- The **table of shewbread** is a combination of the next two phrases and stood on the right when the priest entered the Holy Place. The table contained several pieces with the main piece being 12 loaves of bread representing each of the 12 tribes. The loaves were placed every Sabbath and the priests were the only people allowed to eat the bread.
- The **altar of incense** was smaller than the bronze altar and covered with gold. The altar's placement was in front of the veil separating the two parts of the tabernacle. The burning coals of the brazen altar were placed on this altar for the purpose of offering incense of prayers to God.

Separating the two parts of the tabernacle was a thick veil embroidered with images of cherubim (Ex. 36:35). The Holy of Holies was the place where the Holiest of all resided: God Himself and His glorious presence.

Within the Holy of Holies were the following pieces:

- The **golden censer** - The censer's function was so important on the Day of Atonement that Moses writes: "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not (Lev. 16:12-13). The censer was literally a life-protection plan for the High Priest.
- The **ark of the covenant** – this was the only piece within the Holy of Holies. This chest was overlaid with pure gold and contained 3 important items:
  - Golden pot of manna (Ex. 16:33-34)
  - Aaron's rod that budded (Num. 17)
  - Tablets of the law from Mt. Sinai (Ex. 25:16; 21; 40:20)

The lid of the ark was the mercy seat which was where the cherubim of glory rested. In between the wings is where God met His people.

The lid was the place of propitiation. "John, in using the term "propitiation," in 1 John 2:2, relates Jesus to the mercy seat, since that very word *hilasterion* is used for mercy seat in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 25:17".<sup>1</sup> Kent continues: "The term *hilasterion* is the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew *kapporet* ("covering"), and is somewhat interpretive as it recognizes the propitiatory purpose for which the cover of the ark was employed. The translation *propitiatory cover* is a fair rendering of the term, conveying as it does the fact that "covering involved the covering of sin, not just the covering of the ark" (165). This then was the place the blood atonement was sprinkled by the high priest (Ex. 25:17; Lev. 16:14).

The facets of the earthly sanctuary pointed to Jesus Christ, through whom we would have complete access to God.

<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1983). *Hebrews* (p. 223). Moody Press.

### **III. The functions of the priests (Heb. 9:6-7) – shadow priests**

Every day over and over again the priests did their daily rituals. This included daily incense offered upon the golden altar, oil added to the candlestick, and every Sabbath providing new loaves of bread. They offered sacrifices daily on behalf of the people.

The priests then acted as mediators between the offeror and God. Thousands of animals were offered every day of the year. The animals were killed and their blood sprinkled on the altar. Anyone could offer a burnt offering as an act of devotion or dedication to God. The burnt sacrifice was atonement for sin in general.

That identification was that the sacrifice would become that person's substitute. In other words the animal was substituting its life for the offeror. But there is more. While the sin of the person was committed to the animal, the acceptance of the offering was transferred to the Jew. The blood then was a symbol that the person offering was freely surrendered to God as the sacrifice became atonement for that person.

#### **Conclusion**

In Hebrews 9-10 we find Christ fulfilling the requirements to atone for the sins of the world in comparison to the Day of Atonement. But, no final offering could be made (v. 8) under the old arrangement. Instead, the Day of Atonement with its shadow pieces and shadow priests only pointed to something, actually Someone, greater that was to come. The climax is centered on the perfect blood of Christ offered once with eternal redemption as the result.