

# JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST IN HEAVEN

## HEBREWS 9:11-14, 24-25

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The above nine verses constitute the lesson as indicated by the Lesson Committee; but the subject of the priesthood of Jesus would have only a partial consideration if in the study we confined ourselves to those verses. Therefore we have determined to study the subject, rather than merely the few verses indicated, referring to them when occasion calls for it, just as to other texts.

The priest cannot be viewed apart from the place where he carries on his priestly work, because he is always engaged in it; consequently the study of Christ as priest necessarily involves a consideration of the sanctuary where He ministers. Our first work, therefore, will be to get a clear outline of

### THE SANCTUARY

Our lesson text reminds us that there was on the earth a sanctuary, which was only a figure of the true; and with that sanctuary the names of Moses and Solomon are inseparably connected. In Acts 7:44-49 we have a brief summary of the entire subject. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit was drawing to the close of his "defense," and said:

"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven *is* My throne, and earth *is* My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what *is* the place of My rest?'"

Search the Scriptures through, and you will find that the intelligently believing Jews understood from the first that the tabernacle was only an object lesson, made necessary on account of the unbelief of the people. It was the "tabernacle of witness," but its witness was not that which is effectual among the nations, to bring the end. It was a witness against the Jewish people, rather than to the world, testifying to the fact that their unbelief shut God out of their hearts. Those who believe the Lord receive Him; but Israel did not believe. Yet God did not cast them off, nor become discouraged with them, but said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). They would not allow Him to dwell in their hearts by faith, so He would in a special manner manifest His presence near by, that they might learn more of His power and His glory (Ps. 63:2), and how sacredly His dwelling place must be regarded.

When Solomon after years of labor had built a house, the like of which had never been seen, and which probably has not been equaled since, he used these words in his dedicatory prayer: “But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (2 Chron. 6:18). The builder of the temple well knew that it was not, and could not be, the real dwelling place of God. See also the words of Stephen already cited in Acts 7:44-49, quoted from Isa. 46:1, 2.

### THE TABERNACLE OF GOD WITH MEN

Let us now read a few texts which plainly answer the question asked by Solomon, “Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?” Rev. 21:1-3: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.”

Read on through the chapter, and you will find these words concerning the city: “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light” (Rev. 21:23). Thus we see that when God does in very deed dwell with men on the earth, He will not have any temple in the ordinary, human conception of the word. But let us read further.

### BUILDING THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

In Zech. 6:12, 13 we read: “Then speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: “Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”’” As we read this, the mind involuntarily turns to the words of Christ in answer to the Jews who asked Him for a sign to show that He had authority to drive the buyers and sellers and moneychangers out of the temple rebuilt by Herod: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). Blind because of their unbelief, the Jews caviled, and said: “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” “But He was speaking of the temple of His body,” a temple not made with hands. So little claim had the great building in which they were standing, to be called the temple, and so emphatically was the body of Jesus the temple of the Lord, that He had a right to expect that everybody would know that He meant His body, and not the stone building, when He said “this temple.

From those last two texts we see that Jesus—The BRANCH—builds the temple of the Lord by the power of the resurrection. He was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4); but He was just as much the Son of God before His resurrection as He was afterwards; and hundreds of years before He was manifest in Bethlehem He was sitting and ruling

on the throne, “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:1, 4). His own body was the true tabernacle; His name is Emmanuel, —“God with us;”—and so in His manifestation in the flesh, just as truly as it will be on the new earth, the tabernacle of God was with men, and God did in very deed dwell on the earth.

But that which was, is now; for Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.” He says, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Therefore the tabernacle of God is still with men, and He dwells with them; as we read: “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Cor. 6:16). Thus not only the body of Christ, —that body which was born of Mary, —but all His people, are the temple of God. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

*The church as a whole is the body of Christ, but the same is true of each individual member.* It is our body as well as that which was born of Mary that God has prepared for Him to dwell in and to offer as a living sacrifice. “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19)? Christ Himself is the temple of God, and “if anyone *is* in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Notice that it is when “the former things have passed away,” and He that sits upon the throne says, “Behold, I make all things new,” that the tabernacle of God is with men, and He dwells with them. (Rev. 21:1-5). But “now are we the sons of God” by the power of the resurrection, and that which in the world to come will be true of all creation is even now the case with the true believer. God dwells in those who receive Christ, working through them to reconcile the world unto Himself, even as He did through Christ.

It is worthwhile to notice the difference in the words used concerning David and Solomon, in Acts 7:46, 47. It is said that David found favor with God, and desired to “find” a tabernacle for the God of Jacob; but Solomon “built” Him a house. Now read Ps. 132:1-5: “Lord, remember David and all his afflictions; how he swore to the Lord, and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.” David vowed at one time that he would not go to bed, not shut his eyes in sleep, until he had found—not built—a habitation for the Lord. Anybody can do the same thing now, offering himself as the sanctuary to be kept sacred for the Lord’s abiding place. God has built the tabernacle for His indwelling; our part is to find them; in short, like the prodigal son, each one is to come to himself.

## A LIVING TEMPLE

God dwells “between the cherubim” (Ps. 80:1). In the earthly sanctuary the ark was the principal place of furniture: indeed the temple was built solely to provide accommodation for it. On its top were the two cherubim of gold, between which the glory of the Lord appeared, as He gave commandments to the children of Israel. (See Ex. 20:22). In the first chapter of Ezekiel we have an account of “visions of God,” which the prophet saw, and there we find that the throne of God is a living thing, composed of living creatures. It is not stationary, but moves from place to place wherever and as soon as the mind of God indicates. Now when we see that the cherubim of gold on the mercy seat were simply to indicate the living creatures that constitute God’s real throne, and read that figures of cherubim were upon the curtains that formed the ceiling and veils of the tabernacle, we are forced to conclude that they in like manner indicate that the entire sanctuary in the heavens is composed of living creatures. The “living God” has a living house to dwell in; none other befits Him.

This real, living sanctuary will, for some unknown reason, not appear in the city when it comes down to abide upon this earth. In its stead will be a living temple, however, but one composed of redeemed men. The Lord says: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him My new name*” (Rev. 3:12). Thus Christ, by the power by which He rose from the dead, is now building the temple of the Lord out of the souls and bodies of all who dedicate themselves to Him, to be used by Him in His service. Christ is now engaged in building “the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,” and in restoring the breaches thereof (Acts 15:16, 17); and this He does by sending forth the Gospel to all nations by those who allow Him to dwell in them by His Spirit. The true sanctuary of God is on this earth as well as in heaven; “for thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit” (Isa. 57:15). He dwells on earth and in heaven at the same time. That men form the real temple of the Lord, as contrasted with any house built by man, is clearly indicated in Isa. 66:1, 2, where, after stating that heaven is His throne, and earth His footstool, and asking, “Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?” He continues: “For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the Lord. But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

The church of Christ on this earth has a most direct and intimate connection with the sanctuary in the heavens, since it is the body of Christ, the house of God. When Christ sat one night talking with Nicodemus, He spoke of Himself as “the Son of man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). He is the true heavenly sanctuary, in that “in Him all things consist,” both in heaven and on earth, and He is the soul of everything that is real. Just as He was in heaven while on earth, even so with His people; for God has raised them up together, and made them sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:1-6).

## THE PRIEST'S OFFICE

“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and *people* should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7). This is emphatically true of Christ; for the law is within His heart, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. But merely telling people what they ought to do is not sufficient, since “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” and, having fallen, they cannot lift themselves up again, to walk in the way of righteousness, no matter how good their desires. So it behooved Christ in all things “to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able also to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:17, 18). The principal work of the priest at the present time is to make reconciliation for sins, that is, to restore the image of God in the soul. When the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom as a witness to all nations shall have brought the end, then the priest’s work will be, just as before sin was known, that of ministering the law of life to willing subjects, thus continually unfolding to them and in them the infinite and unfathomable depths and extent of God’s love.

## POWER AND EXTENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

What has just been said is emphasized by the scripture, which tells us the power by which Christ is priest. It is “the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). It is the power of eternity in all its breadth, as well as in its length. By Himself, Christ has purged our sins. (Heb. 1:3). He is a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man, in that He ministers His sinless, eternal life to sinners condemned to death.

Now from His first “goings forth,” “from the days of eternity,” Christ has been ministering life. It was “through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14). Thus He has a priesthood extending from eternity to eternity—“an unchangeable priesthood” because “He ever lives.” He is priest by virtue of His endless life; therefore He could offer Himself to God for our sins. But in doing this no new power was brought into existence, no new office was devised. When sin entered, the priestly office and power to cope with it were already there by virtue of Christ’s endless life. The new conditions did not surprise the Lord, nor find Him unprepared for them. No tax was made upon his resources. Here was a dam by which Satan thought to stop the flow of the river of life; but that mighty stream rolls on in its majestic course, sweeping away every obstacle, and swallowing it up. No new fountain had to be opened, to increase its volume, for the fountain of living waters is He who fills heaven and earth and is from everlasting to everlasting, inhabiting eternity.

“There is a fountain filled with blood  
 Drawn from Immanuel’s veins.  
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
 Lose all their guilty stains.”

## CREATION AND THE CROSS

Redemption is creation. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ’s priestly power was manifested in the first creation just the same as in the restoration, for the new creation is simply the restoration of “that which was from the beginning.” Christ as priest is the minister of endless life. “He gave Himself for our sins,” that He might deliver us from sin. It is on the cross that He makes this sacrifice, giving His life. When He hung on the cross He cried out, “It is finished,” and then “gave up the Ghost,” or, literally, He “breathed out.” Why did He breathe out His life on the cross? — In order that we might breathe it in. But that is exactly what He did in the beginning. God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life, and the lifeless dust became a living soul.

That same work God has been doing ever since, or else all men would have died; for “If He cause His heart to return unto Himself (if He think only of Himself), if He gather unto Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust” (Job 34:14, 15 R. V.), margin. The cross, therefore, is simply the power that first created all things now revealed as sufficient to save that which was lost. So the power of the cross, —the power of Christ’s priesthood, to make reconciliation for sin, — is the power that from eternity has been at work creating and upholding. What confidence this gives us! What wonderful assurance of salvation!

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word,  
What more can life say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled.”

And this foundation is just as firm for the faith of those who are not called saints. The foundation on which the saints stand is the same foundation to which they came as sinners.

## CLEANSING THE SANCTUARY

The eighth chapter of Daniel contains the record of a vision of events reaching to the end of time. After telling about the great apostasy, the prophet says: “Then I heard a holy one speaking; and *another* holy one said to that certain *one* who was speaking, “How long *will* the vision *be*, *concerning* the daily and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed” (Dan. 8:13, 14).

We have not time nor space here to enter into details, but it must suffice to say that a comparison of Dan. 9:24-26 with Ezra 7 shows that the days mentioned in the prophecy began 457 B. C., and so reaches to 1844 A. D. That is the latest date referred to in any prophecy in Scripture, so that all attempts to find a Scripture basis for fixing time for the coming of the Lord are merely speculation and fancy. But some one will ask, “What connection has 1844 with the cleansing of the sanctuary? Since only the blood of Christ

cleanses all things, and that blood is no more efficient at one time than another, how can it be said that at a certain time the sanctuary shall be cleansed? Has not the blood of Christ continually been cleansing the living sanctuary, the church?"

The reply is, that there is such a thing as "the time of the end." Sin must have an end, and the work of cleansing will one day be complete. Now while cleansing has always been obtained through the blood of Christ, and some souls in every generation have been complete, there has never been a time when the church as a whole stood complete, wholly distinct from the world, kept separate by the presence of the life of the Lord, showing Christ manifest in the flesh. But that time must come before the Lord Himself descends from heaven. This will be the proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom in all the world, for a witness to all nations. It will be the time to which many prophets and kings have looked forward with longing.

Now it is a fact that since the middle of the last century new light has shone forth, and the truth of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus is revealed as never before, and the loud cry of the message, "Behold your God!" is being proclaimed. The life of Christ is being seen as never before as the efficient power to cleanse body as well as soul, so that a sinless, healthy people—a whole people, a holy people—are being prepared as a sign to the world. Soon sin will be eradicated from the universe. That glorious end will be attained as soon as every soul on earth has made his final decision as to whether or not he will consent to be filled with the Divine life.

"But what about cleansing a sanctuary in heaven?" is frequently asked; "Is there any defilement there?" Yes, all the sin that has defiled this earth was contained in the sin that Satan committed in heaven. He was one of the cherubim covering the throne of God, and therefore all sin and wickedness was committed in the very secret place of the sanctuary in heaven. The life of God was used in the commission of this sacrilegious deed, and that same life must cleanse it. But that cleansing is one with the work of preparing a people free from all defilement. But Christ is not a ritualist; He is not, like a Roman Catholic priest, away from the body of the people, with His back toward them, doing something in which they have no part, and of which they have no understanding; but all that He does for the people He does in them.

The work will be crowned by the coming of Christ "without sin unto salvation." The power and glory of His coming will simply be the revelation of the priestly power that is now working in men to cleanse them from sin. When the earthly tabernacle was dedicated, the glory of God filled it and shone forth, even so when Christ's people are wholly dedicated to Him. His glory will be seen in them, and they will show forth the praises of Him that has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!" How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?