

LESSON 7: THE BIG PICTURE

Review:

Lessons One, Two, & Three - The purpose of the sanctuary is to remove the barriers of sin and guilt that keep us from face-to-face communion with God. The courtyard illustrates the means of forgiveness the Lord offers those willing to trust Him.

Lessons Four, Five, & Six - The holy place, the first apartment of the tabernacle, illustrates God's provision of the Holy Spirit, the scriptures, and the privilege of prayer. Through the daily services of the sanctuary the guilt of sin was placed first upon the sacrificial victim, and then lodged in the sanctuary itself. This atoned for the sinner, but defiled the sanctuary. The most holy place contained the ark of the covenant, and God's law, the definition of righteousness and sin. On the Day of Atonement the sanctuary was cleansed of its defilement from the process of atoning for the people.

THIS final lesson will focus on an idea which we saw briefly in our last lesson, but didn't take the time to explore in depth—the fulfillment of God's Sacred Calendar.

We saw that there is to be a "cleansing" or "atoning for" of the sanctuary down in the "time of the end." (Daniel 8:14–17) But there is no temple in Jerusalem—and even if one should be rebuilt there someday, Jesus is serving as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary and that's where the cleansing is to take place. (Hebrews 9:23)

That much is clear enough, but it points to an important truth: the sanctuary services were an enacted prophecy of future events. As they went about the ceremonies God had set up, the Jews were acting out the future history of salvation. That's what we want to look at in this lesson

1. "Future history"? Isn't that an oxymoron?

Hebrews 10:1 - For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things.

"Future history" is what predictive prophecy is all about. For us, it's oxymoronic; for God, it's pretty normal. Our job is trying to understand it.

2. Does that mean that the sanctuary is all about the "time of the end," like it said in Daniel chapter 8?

"Much," but not "all." The prophetic aspect of the sanctuary is split between two major time periods. Jesus' return to earth at the time of the end is the second of the two, but the time of His death and resurrection came first. And since those prophecies have already happened, we can use them to check out the accuracy of the later prophecies.

3. The symbolism of the sacrifices is pretty vague as far as specific "history" is concerned. Is that the "prophecy" you're talking about?

No, there are prophetic details that are much more specific, especially concerning the last week of Jesus' life. These come from God's directions for the Passover ceremony. Let's look at some of them:

Exodus 12:3 - On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.

On the tenth day of the month of Nisan, four days before the Passover, the head of every household was to select a lamb to be sacrificed.

On “Palm Sunday,” the ninth day of Nisan, Jesus rode into Jerusalem, hailed as the “Son of David” by the multitudes. This alarmed the religious authorities, but when He returned the next day (the tenth of Nisan, four days before His crucifixion that coming Friday) and chased the moneychangers from the temple a second time, it was just too much. Mark says “The scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.” (Mark 11:18) As predicted, the “Lamb of God” was set aside for death on schedule.

Exodus 12:5 - *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year.*

The sinlessness of Christ is clearly stated in scripture, but at the time of His death—on Passover when every lamb was to be examined prior to the sacrifice—we have the testimony of Pilate no less than three times proclaiming, “I find no fault in Him.” (John 18:38; 19:4; 19:6)

Exodus 12:6 - *Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.*

The Passover was the fourteenth day of Nisan. Despite the high priest’s desire that Christ’s arrest be accomplished “not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people,” Jesus died on the very day predicted.

Exodus 12:46 - *You shall not... break one of its bones.*

The two thieves’ legs were broken, so that they might be taken down from their crosses for the Sabbath, but Jesus—already dead from His superhuman struggle against guilt, doubt, and despair—was spared this further abuse. John recognized the prophetic fulfillment, and said, “these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not one of His bones shall be broken.’” (John 19:36)

There are more examples: Jesus rose on the day of the “Wave Sheaf,” an offering of the first fruits to God. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples fifty days after Passover on the day of Pentecost.

Taken together, the fulfillment of the spring-time feasts is beyond coincidence. These things had been prophesied; now they had been fulfilled.

4. Impressive. But what’s the “future history” part? This is all in the past.

Let’s look at that verse from Hebrews 10 (see question 1) in more complete context:

Hebrews 10:1–2 - *For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.*

Notice the logic here: the Old Testament sacrifices, though “offered continually,” were unable to make the believers “perfect.” And the proof of this is the on-going nature of the services. If the sacrifices had gotten the job done, the believers “would have had no more consciousness of sins,” meaning there would have been no more need for sacrifices.

5. Is that possible?

Hebrews 10:4 - *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.*

No—not possible. Because the “blood of bulls and goats” was just a “shadow.” But notice—what the shadow couldn’t do is what the reality does.

Hebrews 10:14 - *For by one offering He [Jesus] has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*

Hebrews 10:16–18 - *“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,”* then He adds, *“Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”* Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

6. No offering for sin? That doesn't sound good...

Actually, it's a wonderful thing. There is no offering, because there is no need for it. With God's law written in the hearts and minds of His people, rather than just on the tablets of stone, they don't need an offering for sin because they've stopped sinning. God's not one to keep a grudge, so He says “I'll forget all their sins.”

7. What's this got to do with the sanctuary?

Hebrews 10:19–22 - *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Notice the scripture reference here—these verses come right after the quotation of the new covenant passage we just looked at. And this is sanctuary language again. Hebrews is telling us that the new covenant is connected with the sanctuary.

Is it a fluke? A coincidence? Let's look at the follow-up to another quotation of Jeremiah 31. This one is in Hebrews 8, and quotes even more of the original passage:

Hebrews 8:8–12 - *“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 when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them,”* says the LORD. *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”*

That's the new covenant, and right on its heels come fourteen verses about the two sanctuaries, one on earth and the other in heaven. This link between the new covenant and the sanctuary seems quite deliberate.

Hebrews 9:1–14 - *The first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the... tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat....*

Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year.... 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.... But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

8. But it's been almost 2,000 years since Jesus died, and it hasn't happened yet. Is something wrong here?

Hebrews 8:11 - *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.*

The new covenant isn't just some magic trick that God decides to do one day. It's a part of the whole “progressive revelation” idea we saw in Lesson Two. When God's people “know Him” as they one day will, we will see the fulfillment of this promise and prophecy.

9. After two thousand years—there's more to learn about Christianity?

Habakkuk 2:14 - For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Matthew 24:14 - And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Revelation 14:6 - Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.

Remember in our last lesson, how we saw that the plan of salvation couldn't end until the "cleansing of the sanctuary" had demonstrated the "manifold wisdom of God" for all the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places" to see? Notice the parallel here? Only after the gospel has gone, not just to "the world" in general, but to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people," will the end come.

The day is coming when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." And while many will reject that knowledge, God says all His children will "know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."

10. But when is all this supposed to happen? Does the sanctuary tell us that, too?

Well, no, the sanctuary doesn't give us the whole schedule for every piece of God's plan. But it does let us know more or less where we are in the process. Let's get back to the idea of the Sacred Calendar.

Remember how the spring festivals (Passover, Wave Sheaf, Pentecost) were all fulfilled on time and in order by Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension? Well, the yearly cycle of festivals had more to it than just the spring. In the fall, there were three more festivals: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles completed the Sacred Calendar.

11. What does the harvest represent? What does all this mean?

Look at the pattern of these festivals: first, there's a warning given, then the cases of all are decided for life or death, and finally there is a big happy get-together to celebrate the harvest. What do you suppose this might be depicting? Not sure?

Let's follow through a part of the book of Revelation. We'll start with something we've already looked at, chapter 14, verse 12:

Revelation 14:6–7 - Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with

a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come."

This verse is a warning: the day of judgment "has come." Not too surprisingly, Revelation next takes up the topic of what happens to those who are found faulty in the judgment. It's a pretty sobering picture, and it stretches all the way through chapter eighteen. This is some of the most graphic—and discussed—prophetic imagery to be found in all the Bible. These chapters deal with the "mark of the beast," the "seven last plagues," and "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots."

Along the way, we have this portrayal of Christ:

Revelation 14:14, 16 - Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.... [Then] He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Notice the images here in Revelation chapter fourteen: First a worldwide warning, then a judgment, and finally a harvest. Sounds a lot like the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, doesn't it?

12. What about the Feast of Tabernacles? Does it fit in here, too?

Finally, when all the wicked are dealt with, we get to chapter nineteen and its scenes of tumultuous joy:

Revelation 19:1, 6–9 - *After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!"... And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'"

The warning has been given, the judgment has separated the tares from the wheat, friends and loved ones have been reunited by the resurrection, and the righteous are arrayed in the same "fine linen, clean and bright" that formed the defining outer curtain of the sanctuary; Now it's time for praise, rejoicing, and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In other words, after the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, comes the rejoicing and celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles—this time in the New Jerusalem.

13. So—when does this all happen?

The warning message and the judgment of the dead began years ago. (Yes, there is Biblical support for a more specific answer than that, but that level of prophetic interpretation is beyond the scope of these lessons. If you're interested, ask for a series of Bible lessons on prophecy.) But the judgment of the living—actually separating the tares from the wheat—and the final harvest of God's followers from this earth have not yet started.

Why not? Because the Lamb's bride hasn't "made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7)

Because the Church cannot yet be presented to Christ as "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27)

Because "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" have not yet seen a clear display of the "manifold wisdom of God" demonstrated "by the church." (Ephesians 3:10)

Because so many of us (maybe all of us) need a neighbor or a brother to teach us to "know the Lord." (Jeremiah 31:34)

Won't you consider taking up this calling as your life mission?

Why not put all conflicting goals aside, and choose to be one whose full focus is to see the sanctuary finally closed down, and God forever at-one with His people.

Lesson Summary:

- The old testament sacrifices were unable to make God's people perfect - so the services had to go on continually.
- Christ's sacrifice perfects His followers so that ongoing sacrifices are not needed.
- The Bible tells of a time when God's people will fully experience the new covenant and share it throughout the whole world.
- When this happens, the harvest will be ripe and Christ will return in the clouds of Heaven.

My Response:

*It is my desire to have God
write His laws on my heart that
I may be ready for His soon
coming.*