

Text: Heb 9.23-24

Last week we talked about the improbable idea of being cleansed by blood. We don't usually think about blood as a cleansing agent, but of course that is a frequent Bible image.

Now we are going to puzzle over the next couple of verses in Hebrews 9.

Read Heb 9.18-24, text 23-24

Our title is:

Cleansing the Heavenly Things

As we get into this text, one word shows up in three forms: heaven.

- the things in the heavens (23)
- the heavenly things (23)
- heaven itself (24)

The first and the last reference are the same Greek word, one plural and one singular. Both are direct references to heaven.

The middle one is based on the same root but has a slightly different meaning.

“existing *in or above heaven, heavenly*”¹ — an adjective

Effectively, these words are all talking about the same thing, something we've talked about before, the things located in heaven that are the patterns for the earthly tabernacle on earth.

Heb 8.5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “SEE,” He says, “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.”

And of course, our text is talking about Jesus entering that place, into heaven itself (24).

Now, that is our scene. Think again about our text and our title:

Heb 9.23-24 and **Cleansing the Heavenly Things**

¹ ἐπουράνιος in Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889).

Why do things in heaven need cleansing? Or do they?

Proposition: The way into heaven is prepared by the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The concept of type and antitype

A. Defining typology

1. A high-brow definition from the *New Bible Dictionary*

“A way of setting forth the biblical history of salvation so that some of its earlier phases are seen as anticipations of later phases, or some later phase as the recapitulation or fulfilment of an earlier one.”²

2. A little easier, from the Nelson Bible dictionary

“**TYPE** — a figure, representation, or symbol of something to come, as an event in the Old Testament foreshadows another in the New Testament.”³

3. A simple example

- a. The OT sacrifices are incomplete representations of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross
- b. Sacrifice: type, Jesus on the cross: anti-type

4. These very terms are used in Hebrews

- a. Type (τύπος) – Heb 8.5, “MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN” — pattern = type
- b. Antitype (ἀντίτυπος) – Heb 9.24, “For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one” — copy = antitype

We are dealing with a contrast of types and antitypes

² F. F. Bruce, “Typology,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1214.

³ Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Completely Revised and Updated Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

B. The specific contrasts

1. Heb 9.23

- a. “Copies of the things in heaven” vs. “the heavenly things themselves”
- b. Copies = patterns, example, representation
- c. Both phrase set off by μὲν ... δὲ — “on the one hand ... on the other hand”

2. Heb 9.24

- a. “a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true...” vs. “heaven itself”
 - 1) A note: in English, the type is the example, the antitype is the thing copied
 - 2) Here, the word for “a copy of the true” is the Gk “ἀντίτυπος” — just adding to our confusion!
- b. Here the contrast is emphasized with the “strong adversative”, BUT into heaven itself, followed by a purpose statement

These contrasts are fundamental parts of our text, the whole argument works on contrasting the earthly and the heavenly.

II. The necessity of cleansing

A. The verse plays off the idea of all things cleansed by blood (9.18-22, esp. 22)

1. Cleansing of the copies is *necessary* (23)
2. We can understand the need of cleansing the earthly things, the tabernacle, the priests clothing, the implements used in sacrifice
 - a. All imperfect (though skillfully made)
 - b. All made by men
 - c. All polluted by sin (contact with man)
 - d. But all used to picture access to God — **therefore** it was necessary to cleanse them

- B. The verse construction implies it is also necessary to cleanse the heavenly things the earthly tabernacle and its elements prefigured
1. The verb “to cleanse” is not stated in the second part of the verse (but implied)
 - a. But why do heavenly things need cleansing?
 - b. Isn't heaven perfect?
 2. These questions raise all kinds of explanations
 - a. Some want to substitute the idea of “inaugurating” or “dedicating” for “cleansing” as the implied verb
 - 1) They try this in a couple of ways, but...
 - 2) The natural reading of the text is to supply “cleansing,” and the verb used here *only* means cleansing
 - b. Most try to redefine the “heavenly things” that need cleansing (at least 9 interpretations)
 - 1) The cleansing of sins in heaven [allowing for ongoing sin in heaven, but Christ's sacrifice is once for all, and heavenly life is sinless]
 - 2) SDA: the investigation of sins in heaven [False view]
 - 3) A poetic parallel to the earthly tabernacle [this sense not in the text]
 - 4) The cleansing of wrath from heaven [God's wrath affects the ability of man to enter heaven]
 - 5) The cleansing of believers as God's habitation [as Bruce above]
 - 6) The cleansing of the cosmos [the whole created order, but cleansing in Hebrews has to do with present benefits]
 - 7) Dismissal of Satan from heaven [but no clear reference to this in text]
 - 8) Inauguration of the heavenly tabernacle [but grammar is against this view]
 - 9) The cleansing of the sphere of communion

“The sacrifice of Christ opened up a way of access to God’s presence and keeps it open. As sinful pilgrims on their way to the heavenly city, God’s people defile all they touch, even their ‘meeting place’ with God, and they need the constant efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ their High Priest to remove that defilement.”⁴

In other words, Jesus “cleared the way” so we can enter heaven.

3. Regardless of interpretation, there is something *necessary* in heaven, and that is what Jesus did

III. The cleansing of heavenly things

A. Compare 9.11-12

Heb 9.11-12 ¶ But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

1. Entering the holy place (holy of holies) recalls the Yom Kippur ritual (Day of Atonement)
2. Hebrews 8-9 are constantly thinking about this ritual

B. A powerful word in 9.24: “now”

In 1971, the Progressive Conservatives wiped out the long-reigning party in power in Alberta, the Social Credit. My dad ran for the legislature as a SoCred that year and lost dismally. The PCs had a one-word slogan for their campaign, “Now!”

Social Credit had been in power for 36 years. Time to change, “Now!” (My dad told me it was a very powerful slogan.)

⁴ David J. MacLeod, “The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle,” *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 152, no. 605 (1995): 71.

1. Jesus entered into heaven “Now!” to do something
 - a. To cleanse the heavenly things with a better sacrifice than the OT sacrifices (23)
 - b. To enter heaven itself, “in the presence of God” — lit., “to the face of God”
2. Jesus entered “for us” — the cleansing is “for us”
 - a. Recall Ex 33.20

Ex 33.20 But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”
 - b. How can we see God?
 - c. Jesus entered “to the face of God” for us
 - 1) By his death
 - 2) In the form of man
 - 3) To open the way *for us*
3. To recall one of the ways of understanding the heavenly things, “The cleansing of the sphere of communion”

“The sacrifice of Christ opened up a way of access to God’s presence and keeps it open. As sinful pilgrims on their way to the heavenly city, God’s people defile all they touch, even their ‘meeting place’ with God, and they need the constant efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ their High Priest to remove that defilement.”⁵

In other words, Jesus “cleared the way” so we can enter heaven.
4. You couldn’t get there by yourself — the way was barred — until Jesus entered the heavenly place, before the face of God, *for us*

Conclusion:

Proposition: The way into heaven is prepared by the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are no tripping stones, or trip wires, or trick questions in the way. If you trust in Christ, he cleansed the way to the very face of God ... so you can live!

⁵ David J. MacLeod, “The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle,” *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 152, no. 605 (1995): 71.