

Access to Heaven on Earth in the Divine Service

The Theology of Worship in Hebrews

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A. The Ministry of Jesus as our Great High Priest

1. Why go to church?

- a. Audience with God in Hebrews 4:16: ***Let us then with freedom of speech approach the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace for well-timed help.***
 - Appearance before God's royal throne
 - Reception of mercy
 - Gracious help for ourselves and others
- b. Present challenge to traditional order of service for corporate worship from Pentecostal movement: spiritual ascent to heaven with praise singing as the bridge
- c. Solution: liturgical teaching in Hebrews on the flesh and blood of Jesus as our means of access to God's heavenly presence here on earth

2. What do we gain from our participation in the divine service?

- a. **Hoped for reception of what God has promised (11:1)**
 - We boast in what we hope for as a present possession (3:6).
 - We are to strive for the full reception of what we hope for (6:11.)
 - We have set before us our hoped for entry into the inner place behind the curtain (6:18.)

- We have the hope of something better than in the NT, the hope by which we come near to God (7:19).
- We need to retain the confession of what we hope for (10:23).

b. We receive **the seven better things that belong to our salvation** (6:9)

- Hope of better access to God (7:19)
- Better covenant (7:22) based on better promises (8:7)
- Purification by better sacrifices (9:23)
- Better possessions that endure (10:34)
- A better heavenly homeland (11:16)
- A better resurrection (11:23)
- The blood of Jesus that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (12:24)

c. We **have seven eschatological blessings** as gifts from God

- Jesus as great high priest (4:14-15; 8:1; 10:21)
- Strong encouragement to keep hold of the sure and certain hope of entry into the inner place that is set before us (6:18-19)
- Freedom of speech with God in His heavenly sanctuary (10:19)
- The possession of a lasting great reward from our freedom of speech (10:34-35)
- Departed saints as unseen witnesses all around us (12:1)
- God's grace (12:28)
- A heavenly altar with heavenly food from God (13:10)

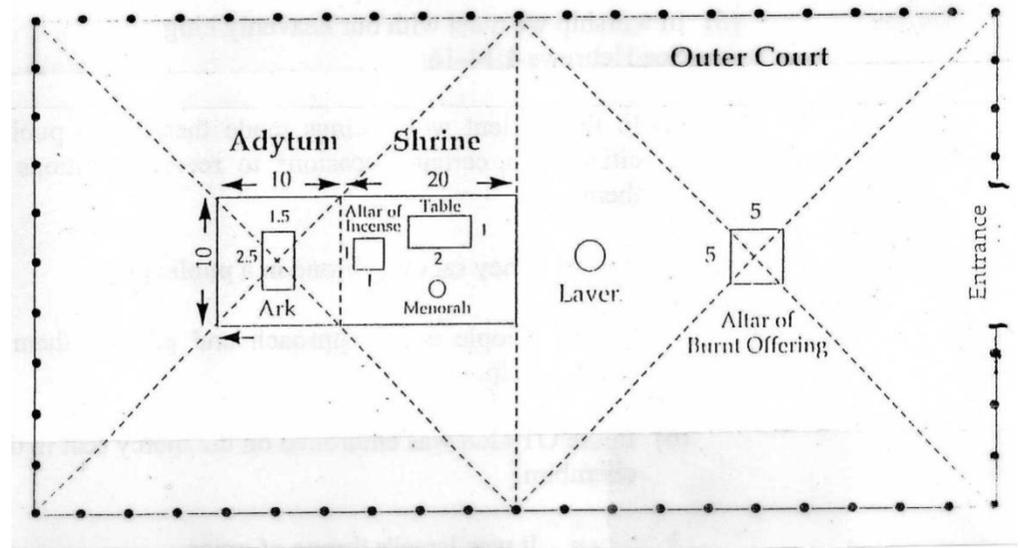
d. We enjoy **five heavenly things** as a foretaste of eternity

- A heavenly calling (3:1)
- Heavenly food (6:4)

- Heavenly things in the heavenly tabernacle (9:23): model for earthly tabernacle with its contents (8:5; cf. 9:21)
- A heavenly homeland (11:16)
- Heavenly Jerusalem (12:22)

3. How does the divine service in the NT differ from the OT?

- a. What was necessary for the enactment of the service in the OT?
 - Divine institution through his word
 - Holy place for God's meeting with his people
 - Priests as representatives of the people and God
 - Holy offerings
 - An altar as a bridge between God in heaven and his people on earth
 - Ritual enactment for interaction between God and his people
- b. God's institution of the divine service as his gift to the Israelites in his covenant at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 25-30
 - Institution by God's law which Moses received from God on Mt. Sinai
 - Provision of the tabernacle as a sanctuary: God's earthly dwelling place with his people (Ex 25:8)



- The Most Holy Place with the ark and the mercy seat as God's throne: private residence with entry by high priest on the Day of Atonement (cf. 9:7)
- The Holy Place with the altar for incense, the table for the show bread, and the lampstand: daily meeting place with the priests as his servants (cf. 9:6)
- Division by a double layered curtain (cf. 10:20)
- Courtyard with altar for burnt offering and water basin in the eastern half
- Tabernacle, lampstand and altar for burnt offering as copies of heavenly models (Ex 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8; Num 8:4; cf. 8:5; 9:23)
- The holy way for God to meet His people in the holy places: from the ark to incense altar to the altar for burnt offering (cf. 9:8; 10:19-20)
- Provision of vestments and rite of ordination for Aaron and his sons
 - Special vestments for the high priest: crown, ephod and breastplate with names of 12 tribes

- Rite of ordination for completion/perfection over seven days
 - ❖ Washing with water (cf. 9:10; 10:23)
 - ❖ Clothing with vestments
 - ❖ Anointing of high priest with most holy oil
 - ❖ Sin offering of bull (cf. 9:12; 10:4) and burnt offering of a ram
 - ❖ Application of blood from ram for ordination on right ears, thumbs and big toes before splashing the rest against the altar
 - ❖ Splinkling of the most holy blood from the altar mixed with the most holy anointing oil on their vestments and bodies (cf. 9:13-14; 10:22; 12:24)
 - ❖ Presentation of offering for ordination
 - ❖ Eating of holy meat and bread (cf. 13:10)
- Provision of the daily service for enactment each morning and evening in Ex 29:42-46: ***Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord. It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you (pl.), to speak with you (sing.), There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron and his sons I will consecrate***

to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.

- Offering of male lamb, flour with olive oil, and wine
- Enactment of the service in five stages
 - ❖ Splashing of blood in rite of atonement: cleansing from sin
 - ❖ Burning of incense in an act of intercession
 - ❖ Offering up offerings in smoke to God (cf. 7:27): divine theophany (cf. 1:3)
 - ❖ Performance of benediction
 - ❖ Eating of leftover most holy bread by the priests (cf. 13:10)
- Purpose of the service
 - ❖ God's meeting with his people
 - ❖ God's speaking to Moses/the high priest
 - ❖ Consecration of Israelites by his presence
 - ❖ God's dwelling with his people

c. God's institution of the divine service in the new covenant

- Institution by God's better promises (8:6)
- Appointment of Jesus as an eternal high priest
 - God's call of Jesus like Aaron (5:4-5)
 - Like the high priest who was anointed with the most holy anointing oil (Ex 29:7; 30:22-33), Jesus was God's anointed priest: משיח /**Messiah** = **χριστός/Christ**
 - God's appointment of Jesus in Ps 110 by His decree (1:13; 5:6) and His oath (7:17-21, 28) rather than the law

- Jesus as a royal priest in the order of Melchizedek rather than a Levitical priest in the order of Aaron (5:9; 6:20; 7:11)
- Jesus as an eternal priest with uninterrupted service rather than temporary priest whose service ended in death (7:3, 23-27, 25)
- His descent from the royal tribe of Judah rather than the priestly tribe of Levi (7:14)
- His qualification for the priesthood by his resurrection rather than genetic ancestry: Spirit v flesh (7:15-17)
- The "perfection" of Jesus as our human high priest in a process that began with his conception, culminated in his death as an act of self-offering, and was completed at his ascension (2:10; 5:7-9; 7:28), in order to "perfect" God's people for service before God in heaven (2:10; 7:11, 19, 26-28)
- The sanctuary of the new covenant
 - The God-made heavenly tabernacle (8:1-8; 9:11, 24)
 - The congregation as God's house/temple (3:6; 10:21)
 - Jesus as our liturgist in the heavenly, holy places (8:2; 9:8; 10:19)
- The service of the new covenant
 - Christ's self-sacrifice in order to do away with sin (9:26), remove our sins with his blood (7:27; 9:28; 10:4, 11), and sanctify us with his body (10:10,14)
 - Appearance before God with his blood once for all on our behalf (9:11-12; 9:24-26) to purify and sanctify us with his blood (9:13-14; 10:29; 13:12)
 - Jesus our mediator in the new covenant (8:6; 9:15; 12:24)

- The purification of our conscience for God-pleasing service of the living God (9:14; 12:28-29)
- The altar of the new covenant (13:10)

5. The service of the new covenant

- a. The present priestly ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary
 - He now appears before God the Father on our behalf (9:24).
 - He now makes atonement for our sins before God by reconciling us with him (2:17).
 - He cleanses our conscience with his blood for the service of the living God (9:14).
 - He consecrates us with his blood (2:11; 10:29; 13:12).
 - He intercedes with God the Father on our behalf (7:25).
 - He presents us with himself to the Father (2:13).
 - He praises his heavenly Father by proclaiming His name to us (2:12): leader of the heavenly choir

- b. The high-priestly status and heavenly vocation of the congregation
 - The sanctification of the congregation by Jesus (2:11; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12)
 - The congregation as holy brothers of Jesus the high priest (3:1), a royal priestly brotherhood (13:1): partakers and partners (μέτοχοι) of the Christ (3:14)
 - The congregation as God's house = household and temple (3:5; 10:21): location on earth and in heaven
 - Its access to the most holy heavenly sanctuary through the flesh and blood of Jesus (10:19)
 - Its possession of an altar from which it receives heavenly food (13:9-10; cf. 6:4)
 - Its access to God the Father through Jesus (7:25; cf. 7:19)

- The offering of its sacrifices of praise to God and gifts of mercy to God through Jesus (13:15, 16).
- Its service of the living God in the heavenly sanctuary by His grace (9:14; 12:28)

B. Five Key Passages for the Theology of Worship in Hebrews

1. Hebrews 4:1-13: entry into God's place of rest

- In ancient Babylon the gods made humans serve them by providing for their necessities, so that they could have rest.
- According to Genesis 2:2-3, God created humans to rest with him.
 - At Sinai he instituted the Sabbath by his word as a work-free day as a **time of rest** for them (Ex 16:26-29; 20:8-11; 31:12-17).
 - Instead of doing ritual work for him, the whole community **rested** (נוח) from all work (Ex 23:12; Deut 5:14) just as God had **rested** on the seventh day (Ex 20:11).
 - He blessed and sanctified them through their resting with him on that day.
- God chose to make the temple a **place of rest** (הנוח = κατάπαυσις) for his ark and himself with his people (Ps 132:8, 14; 1 Chr 28:2; 2 Chr 6:41; cf. 1 Chr 6:31)
- He gave them the land (Deut 12:9; Josh 1:13) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:56) as **their place of rest** with him (Ps 95:11; 116:7).
- In Psalm 95 the Levitical choir called on the people to join with them in praising the Lord at the temple on the Sabbath.
 - They urged the people to listen to God's voice.
 - They warned the people that those who did not listen would not enter God's place of rest.
- Jesus has fulfilled God's promise to provide a place of rest for his people in their heavenly homeland.

- The Israelites in the desert did not enter God's heavenly place of rest, because they did not believe in the gospel (4:2, 6; cf. 3:16-19).
- We who believe the gospel now enter that heavenly **place of rest** (4:3) just as we continue to strive to enter it once and for all (4:11).
 - Heaven is the place for the eternal **sabbath celebration** for all God's people (σαββατισμὸς τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ).
 - Through faith in the gospel we cease from our labors, as God did from his (4:10), because we can rely on what Christ has accomplished for us and receive the benefits of his work.
 - Instead of just visiting it, we strive to make it our permanent home.
- We enter God's rest in the divine service by listening to the word of God which judges and saves us (4:11-13): ***¹¹Let us therefore be eager to enter into that place of rest, so that no one may fall by the same example of faithlessness. ¹²For the Word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged knife, penetrating even to the division of soul and spirit, the joints as well as the marrow, and able to judge the fantasies and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is invisible in his sight, but all things are naked and helpless to the eyes of him to/about whom [is] our word.***
 - His living word makes and keeps us spiritually alive.
 - His energizing word changes and empowers us.
 - His penetrating word deals with the evil at the very core of our bodies and spirits: picture of God as a heart surgeon
 - His critical word judges and exposes the secrets of our hearts: by it God operates on us like a surgeon to fix us up
- We enter God's rest by listening to that word in the divine service.
 - There God's word is spoken powerfully to us.
 - Through his word He does his work with us and in us there.
 - There we rest from our work by listening to God and letting him do his work in us.

2. Hebrews 4:14-16: our audience with the heavenly King:

¹⁴Therefore, having a great High Priest who has gone through the heavenly places, Jesus, the Son of God, let us keep hold of the confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way like us, [yet] without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come near to the throne of grace with freedom of speech, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for well-timed help.

- The use of προσέρχομαι as a technical liturgical term seven times in Hebrews
 - Use in the LXX for approaching God at the tabernacle: the priests and the people at the altar for burnt offering (Lev 9:5-7)
 - Use here for the congregation's approach of God in the heavenly sanctuary (4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12: 18, 22)
- The use in Hebrews of παρρησία as free speech, outspokenness, boldness in speaking (3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35).
 - Right of free speech in the public citizens assembly of a Greek city state
 - Freedom of speech in public domain
 - Free access to speak to a public official
 - Confidence in approaching and addressing God
- In the ancient world kings held a public audience with their citizens on certain occasions at the palace or on royal visits to receive petitions and complaints from them.
 - They sat on a throne in throne room or a public place.
 - People could approach and petition them there for mercy and help.
- In the OT God was enthroned on the mercy seat in the temple between the cherubim.

- God's throne as the place where God the heavenly King grants mercy and grace to his people
- The mercy seat as Israel's throne of grace
- They addressed their petitions to him at the altar in the divine service: limited access to him
- As God's royal Son Jesus sits with God on his heavenly throne and serves as both priest and king.
 - He has bridged the gap between the God in heaven and us on earth by passing through the heavens.
 - As our high priest he sympathizes with us and brings us with him into the Father's presence.
 - Since we have him as our high priest, we can approach God the heavenly king boldly with freedom of speech.
 - We receive mercy: pardon for sin and acceptance as God's royal sons and Christ's brothers.
 - We find grace for timely help from God for ourselves and others.
- Worship as reception from God

3. Hebrews 10:19-22: our access to the heavenly sanctuary: ¹⁹Therefore, brothers, having freedom of speech for entry into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰which he inaugurated for us as a new and living way through the curtain, that is, [the way] of his flesh, ²¹and [having] a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us come near with a true heart in the fullness of faith, having had our hearts sprinkled from a bad conscience and having had our body washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful, ²⁴and let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, ²⁵not forsaking the communal assembly, as is the habit of some, but giving encouragement, and all the more so as you see the Day approaching.

- Limited access to God in the Old Testament

- Access of Israelites to the altar for burnt offering
- Access of the priests to the Holy Place in the daily service
- Access of the high priest to the Holy of Holies: veiled in a cloud of incense
- Entry of high priest on the Day of Atonement
 - Consecration by blood mixed with anointing oil which was sprinkled on his body
 - Washing of whole body with water
 - Entry through double layered curtain
 - Entrance with blood from the sin offerings: bull for priests and goat for people
 - Sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat and floor, the incense altar and floor, the altar for burnt offering
 - Sanctification of holy way for God to meet with his people at the altar for burnt offering
- Two great gifts that we all have
 - Privilege of freedom of speech for entry into God's heavenly house
 - Jesus as our great priest in God's house: our mediator
- Our entry
 - The holy way into God's presence (see 9:8-9)
 - Three senses of τὰ ἁγία in Hebrews
 - ❖ The Holy Place of the tabernacle (9:1, 2) in contrast with the Holy of Holies (9:3)
 - ❖ The inner shrine of the tabernacle (9:24, 25; 13:11) ► the heavenly sanctuary = God's presence, God's throne, the throne of grace (8:2; 10:19)
 - ❖ The holy things that give access to these places (8:2; 9:8) ► the body and blood of Jesus
- Our privilege of open access in the new covenant: free speech in approaching God

- Contrast: restricted access ► open access to God
- The new and living way
 - ❖ New way: inaugurated and consecrated by Jesus
 - ❖ Living way: life-giving risen Lord with his flesh and blood rather than the flesh and blood of a dead animal
- Jesus as our high priest in the heavenly house of God
 - Merciful in bringing God's gifts to us: exit and descent (2:17)
 - Faithful in bringing us to God: ascent and entry (2:17)
- Open access to the heavenly sanctuary together with Jesus
 - Phrase in his blood: allusion to Holy Communion from Luke 22: 20 and 1 Cor 11:25
 - ❖ Sprinkling of hearts with the blood of Jesus: holy hearts
 - ❖ Contrast with sprinkled bodies of priests (9:13-14): see Ex 29:21; Lev 8:30
 - ❖ Blood for sprinkling: the speaking blood = seventh gift in 12:24
 - Washing of bodies with water in baptism: pure bodies
 - Our approach through the flesh and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion
- Double sense of πληροφορία in 10:22 and earlier in 6:11
 - Full delivery of an assured and assuring gift
 - Full assurance that it brings: answer to fear of rejection
- Faith as full assurance of our favorable reception by God
 - Basis: our washing and sprinkling
 - Assured access through faith in Jesus
- Our qualification for entry: **sprinkling of hearts**
 - Bad conscience ► good conscience (13:18)
 - Conscience cleansed for divine service (9:14)
- Safe access to the Father's presence through the divine service

4. Hebrews 12:18-25: our participation in the heavenly service: ¹⁸*For you have not come near to something that may be touched and to a blazing fire and to darkness and to gloom and to a storm cloud ¹⁹and to a blast of a horn and to a voice with utterances, whose hearers refused [to hear] any further word that would be given to them ²⁰because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned,” ²¹and what was shown was so frightful that Moses said: “I am terrified and trembling.”*

²²*But you have come near to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels in festal gathering ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to the Judge, who is God of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect ²⁴and to the mediator of a new covenant, Jesus, and to the blood for sprinkling that speaks something better than Abel.*

²⁵*See that you do not refuse him who is speaking; for if those did not escape when they refused him who spoke a divine proclamation on earth, how much less [will] we [escape] if we turn away from him [who speaks a divine proclamation] from heaven, ²⁶whose voice then shook the earth, but now has made a promise, saying: “Yet once more I will shake up not just the earth but also the heaven.” ²⁷Now this phrase “yet once more” indicates a removal of what can be shaken as things that have been made, so that what cannot be shaken will remain.*

²⁸*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, through which let us serve God in a well-pleasing way with reverence and awe, ²⁹for, indeed, our “God is a consuming fire.”*

- God’s frightening theophany at Sinai with seven visible phenomena
 - A tangible, fenced mountain (cf. Ex 19:11-13; Deut 4:11; 5:22)
 - Blazing fire (Ex 19:18; Deut 4:11, 33, 36; 5:22-26)
 - Darkness (Deut 4:11; 5:23)
 - Eerie gloom (Ex 20:21; Deut 4:11; 5:22)
 - Storm cloud (Ex 19:16; 20:18; Deut 4:11; 5:22)

- Sound of trumpet (Ex 19:16, 19; 20:18)
- God's voice speaking the Decalogue to the congregation of Israel (Ex 19:19; 20:19; Deut 4:12,33,36; 5:22-27)
- God's gracious theophany in heavenly Zion with seven invisible gifts
 - Heavenly Jerusalem on Mount Zion where God gives access to his grace and heaven meets earth
 - The angels who assist God's people in adoration and praise (Heb. 1:14; Luke 2:13-14; Rev 4:8-11; 5:9-14)
 - The heavenly assembly (ἐκκλησία) of God's people: all first born sons with full rights of inheritance in the church around the world
 - God the Judge who condemns sin and pardons penitent people
 - Perfected saints with their perfect adoration and praise (see the cloud of witnesses in 12:1)
 - Jesus as the mediator of new covenant in the Lord's Supper
 - Blood for sprinkling that speaks pardon, cleansing and holiness (see 9:14; 10:22; 1 Pet 1:2): means for the other six gifts
- In the divine service God speaks through Jesus from heaven in order to deliver His grace and His unshakable kingdom to them (12:25-29)
 - Five unshakable things in the Psalms
 - ❖ The righteous (Ps 15:5; 16:8; 17:5; 112:6)
 - ❖ Zion (Ps 46:5; cf. Is 33:20)
 - ❖ The citizens of Zion (Ps 125:1)
 - ❖ The Messianic King (Ps 21:7)
 - ❖ God's kingdom on earth (Ps 93:1; 96:10)
 - The things that remain in the new heavens and earth that remain forever (Is 66:22)
 - ❖ The priesthood of Jesus (7:3, 24)
 - ❖ The better possessions of God's people (10:34)
 - ❖ Brotherly love (13:1)
 - ❖ The heavenly city (13:14)

C. Conclusion: twelve inclusive exhortations for faithful, hopeful participation in the divine service

1. Let us be afraid of any member failing to enter God's place of rest (4:1)
2. Let us be eager to enter God's place of rest by listening to His voice (4:11)
3. Let us hold fast to the confession of Jesus as God's Son (4:14)
4. Let us come near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace (4:16)
5. Let us be carried along by Jesus for full participation in the divine service (6:1)
6. Let us come near to God in the heavenly sanctuary with the full assurance of faith (10:22)
7. Let us hold onto the confession of hope in God's promises (10:23)
8. Let us consider how to provoke each other to love and good works by faithful attendance of the divine service (10:24)
9. Let us run the race of faith by looking up to Jesus (12:1-2)
10. Let us have grace by which we can serve God in a well-pleasing way (10:28)
11. Let us go out to Jesus from earthly Jerusalem (13:13)
12. Let us offer a verbal sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus (13:15)