

• *The tabernacle is now gone*

• *Jesus' blood is effective now for believers*

• *Illustrated by the example of a will which becomes effective after a person dies*

Diatheke – a contemporary word illustrates the meaning of an ancient word

(i) *The donor makes the plans*

(ii) *The arrangements are made by the 'testator'*

(iii) *The beneficiaries must accept the terms of the inheritance*

(iv) *The testament comes into effect when the testator dies*

A death was needed for the old covenant to work

Our writer is explaining the main significance of the tabernacle. It has been fulfilled in Jesus. It is destined to pass away – says our writer. Since the letter to the Hebrews was written the sacrificial system has indeed disappeared. The Jews of today have not kept the sacrificial system in Jerusalem since AD 70. Jesus passed into heaven. His blood (i) gives those who believe eternal redemption, (ii) provides daily cleansing for those who will persist in faith, (iii) enables the receiving of the promises of God.

Now our writer illustrates his point by using the example of a will or 'testament' which a person draws up to enable his son to inherit his possessions after he dies. ¹⁶*For where there is a 'will' or 'testament', the death of the one who made it must be established.* No one gets anything until it is proved that the person who wrote the will is dead. ¹⁷*For a testament only becomes a firm reality when someone dies. It never has any effectiveness while the one who made the will is still alive.*

In ancient Israel the covenants enabled the promises of God to be fulfilled. But in some ways this resembled the 'will' or 'testament' of the first century AD. So the writer plays with the word *diatheke* which has an Old Testament Greek meaning ('covenant') and a first-century Greek meaning ('testament'). The 'testament' of the first century AD was a good illustration of what the writer means by inheriting something as the result of 'covenant'. It makes me think of the way in which modern preachers sometimes use the modern Greek *arrabōn* (meaning 'engagement ring') to illustrate the Bible-meaning of *arrabōn* (pledge, down-payment, foretaste^{□1}). An 'engagement ring' is a good illustration of a 'down-payment' or 'pledge'. The modern meaning illustrates the ancient meaning. This is exactly what our writer is doing. 'Testament' illustrates 'covenant'. A contemporary word illustrates the meaning of an ancient word.

The new covenant resembles a 'testament' or human 'will'. (i) The donor makes the plans for someone to inherit what he has to give them. (ii) The arrangements are made by the 'testator' – the one giving away his possessions at death. (iii) The beneficiaries must accept the terms of the inheritance (in our case faith and patience). (iv) The covenant or testament only comes into effect when the person giving the blessings dies. All of this illustrates how God gives us our inheritance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even the old **covenant** was the same at this point, since the blessings of the law were never put into effect without animal sacrifice. A death was needed for the covenants to work! He says: ¹⁸*Thus not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.* He refers back to the story of Exodus 19–24 when the covenant between Israel and God via Moses first began. It is possible that he is also using traditions known to the writer but not mentioned in the Old Testament. He says: ¹⁹*For when every commandment of the law had been told by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves,^a with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.* Not all the details are to be found in Exodus 24:3–8. However, it may well have been known from tradition that some of the ceremonies mentioned elsewhere^{□1□2}

□1 Ephesians
1:14

□1 see
Leviticus 14:4-6;
49-52
□2 Numbers
19:1-10; 17-18

• *Sprinkled blood*

• *No one could be forgiven or released from the penalties of the law without the shedding of the blood in sacrifice*

For today

• *Without the shedding of the blood of Jesus there is no forgiveness of sins*

• *More serious sins may be forgiven*

were **also** used on Mount Sinai. Evidently some of the blood of sacrifice was diluted with water. The wool was put on the end of the branch of the hyssop tree to make a 'mop' and that was used to sprinkle the book of the law. By the sprinkling of blood Moses inaugurated the old covenant. ²⁰*He said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.'* Later when the tabernacle was built something similar happened again. ²¹*And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the utensils used in worship.* The 'utensils' included such things as the table, the bread, the wick trimmers, the pots and shovels and basins and plates, and so on.

Hebrews 9:22 says: *Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.* There were a few exceptions. The word 'almost' allows for such things as the grain offering¹ although even that was normally offered in conjunction with other sacrifices which involved bloodshed. This is the main point: without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. No one could be forgiven or released from the penalties of the law, or from the condemnations concerning skin diseases, or from the dozens of small ways in which the law could impose penalties and judgements – without the shedding of the blood in sacrifice.

For today, there can be no kind of forgiveness of sins without the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross. The tabernacle-system presents a picture of this very point (although the blood-sacrifices could only help with small matters). The fulfilment is in the Lord Jesus Christ, but in that case more serious sins may be forgiven. All manner of sins and transgressions may be forgiven the children of the human race¹. Forgiveness is by atonement. Even God could not look at our sins and say, 'Let's forget you ever did that'. Forgiveness is not by compromise. It is by the sacrifice of a substitute, by the death-penalty in all its fullness coming upon Jesus. Without the shedding of the blood of Jesus there is no forgiveness of sins.

Note

a. Some manuscripts have 'the blood of calves and goats'. It makes no difference,

¹ Leviticus 5:11-13

¹ see Mark 3:28



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