KEY VERSE
The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9:22

HEBREWS 9:11–22
11 But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. 16 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17 because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19 When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20 He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” 21 In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

INTRODUCTION
A. Nothing but the Blood of Jesus
The simple melody line of Robert Lowry’s gospel song “Nothing but the Blood” uses only a five-note range and two chords. The song’s lyrics likewise are straightforward, punctuated by the simple declaration, “Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” In its simplicity, this song celebrates the majestic theme found within Hebrews 9:11–22: our high priest Jesus Christ has offered his blood to make perfect reconciliation for sinners. By that blood, we enter into God’s new covenant. This concept is unfamiliar to many.

B. Lesson Context
Undergirding today’s study are three concepts that are vitally important in the book of Hebrews. Those three are high priest, covenant, and blood. Their importance is revealed in the fact that, in each case, the book of Hebrews features more uses of those words than any other New Testament book by proportion of size. A priest is a go-between; another word we could use is mediator. That position in Old Testament times involved interceding with God on behalf of unclean people (see Leviticus 14; 15). The founding of the Old Testament priesthood is recorded in Exodus 28; 29 and Leviticus 8. The high priest is the one “who has had the anointing oil poured on his head” (Leviticus 21:10). The death of the high priest resulted in relief from prosecution in specific instances (Numbers 35:25, 28; Joshua 20:6). The original word that is translated variously as “covenant” occurs 33 times in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews has 17 of those 33 instances, demonstrating its importance. The opening verses of Hebrews 8 pronounce that Jesus has obtained a more excellent ministry than the priestly ministry of the first covenant. In so doing, he has become the mediator of a superior covenant—a covenant that is based on better promises (Hebrews 8:1, 2, 6). When the writer quotes Jeremiah 31:31–34 regarding God’s offer of a new covenant (Hebrews 8:8–12), the implication is that there was a flaw in the old covenant. Any flaw, however, was not on God’s side. Humanity proved unable and/or unwilling to honor the provisions of that covenant (Hebrews 8:7, 8, 13). The early part of Hebrews 9 then describes the old covenant sanctuary, the tabernacle. This structure and its successor (the temple) provided Israel only limited access to God. Barriers still existed between the worshipper and God (compare Exodus 29:9; Hebrews 9:7, 8). The mention of blood in Hebrews 9:7 prepares the reader for the frequent use of
that word throughout our lesson text for today. As with the word translated “covenant,” the word translated “blood” occurs more often proportionally in Hebrews than any other New Testament book. Scripture treats blood as the life force of a creature (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10–14; Deuteronomy 12:23). The use of blood of sacrificed animals to save Israel is seen explicitly in the blood of lambs smeared on doorposts in Egypt (Exodus 12:7). The mention of blood is connected with violent death (see Genesis 4:10; Matthew 27:4, 24, 25). Hebrews 9:1–10 describes the worship and sacrificial practices under the old covenant as temporary and inadequate for cleansing worshippers’ sins. In God’s redemptive plan, Israel merely anticipated “the time of the new order” that would come through the ministry of Christ (Hebrews 9:10). That ministry is tightly connected with the concepts of high priest, covenant, and blood.

I. Better Solution (Hebrews 9:11–14)

A. In Heaven’s Sanctuary (v. 11)

11a. But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, The title Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew title Messiah (compare John 1:41; 4:25). Both words are transliterations to speakers of English, not translations. A translation would be “Anointed One” (compare the anointing language in Hebrews 1:9). In the Old Testament, this title can refer to anyone anointed for God’s purposes. This includes priests, kings, prophets, and even the people (examples: Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16; 2 Samuel 1:14, 16; 23:1; Psalm 105:15; Lamentations 4:20). But the writer of Hebrews uses the anointing concept inherent in the title Christ to refer to Jesus exclusively. Jesus fulfills the tasks that all those who had been anointed before him were meant to accomplish. To earlier descriptions of Jesus as “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Hebrews 2:17) and as “a great high priest” (4:14), the writer now adds high priest of the good things. Those good things are the better promises and better covenant mentioned previously in Hebrews 8:6. That are now already here celebrates the good that has already happened under Christ; we are cleansed of our sins and have a renewed relationship with the Father today. We already experience some blessings of being in his kingdom (Matthew 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–22). The phrase also looks forward to the continuation of those blessings when we will stand perfect before him and enjoy eternity in paradise (Hebrews 6:4). As we serve him now, we look forward to the day when we will receive our eternal inheritance in full (9:14, 15).

11b. He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. The reference here is that of the heavenly sanctuary that served as the pattern for the old covenant’s tabernacle (Exodus 25:40; 26:30; Hebrews 8:1, 2, 5). The phrase not made with human hands emphasizes this sanctuary’s divine origin and celestial location. Because it was not made by humans, it cannot be destroyed (compare Matthew 6:19–21; 2 Corinthians 5:1; see also Acts 7:48; 17:24).

B. For Eternal Redemption (v. 12)

12a. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood. The writer sharpens the contrast between the old covenant’s Aaronic priesthood (see Exodus 28:1, 41; 29:44; etc.) and the new-covenant priestly work of Christ. God had graciously provided Israel with the sacrificial system as a means to deal with sin. The animal’s life was to be given in exchange for the lives of the worshippers whose sins placed them under the penalty of death (compare Romans 3:23; 6:23). The sacrificial animals were to be without blemish (Leviticus 4:3, 23, 28, 32; Malachi 1:8). But even if they were, their blood was ultimately inadequate to take away sin (Hebrews 10:1, 4). So, in contrast with the levitical priests who offer the blood of goats and calves, Christ has come into the heavenly Most Holy Place with his own blood. His blood is the perfect sacrifice because he was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). He came as the Lamb of God to take away the world’s sins (John 1:29), and he offered himself willingly in that regard (John 10:14–18). The fact that he entered the Most Holy Place underscores the total sufficiency of his sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 10:10). The writer uses the word blood more than 20 times in this book, but this is only the third instance so far. (The first two are Hebrews 2:14; 9:7). He will have much more to say about blood below.

12b. Thus obtaining eternal redemption. This half-verse gives the result of Christ’s work as superior priest and superior sacrifice. The word translated redemption can be used to describe the procedure by which a slave is bought out of bondage and granted freedom (see also Luke 1:68; 2:38; 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; compare Deuteronomy 7:8; Leviticus 25:25–27; etc.). That the redemption secured by Christ is eternal is significant on two counts. First, redemption is one of six things described as eternal in Hebrews. The other five are salvation (Hebrews 5:9); judgment (6:2), God’s Spirit (9:14, below), inheritance (9:15, below), and covenant (13:20). The word redemption is in some powerful company indeed! Second, and closely related, is the fact that the word eternal connotes a permanence associated with Heaven (Psalm 119:89, 90; 2 Corinthians 5:1) in contrast with the temporary nature of those things associated with the old covenant.
C. For Full Cleansing (vv. 13, 14)

13, 14. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! The thrust of these verses is made in an argument from lesser to greater. This harkens back to a purification ritual described in Numbers 19:1–10, 17–19. People could become unclean by touching dead bodies or coming into contact with things considered unclean under the Mosaic law (Leviticus 11–15; notice that being unclean is not necessarily the same as committing sin). Those in such an unclean state would profane objects with which they came in contact. For that reason, unclean people were disqualified from participating in tabernacle or temple worship lest they profane the sanctuary. Nevertheless, the law provided sanctification rituals whereby persons could be ritually purified. If the blood of animals could provide external, ritual cleaning, then think of how much more effective is the cleansing provided by Christ’s blood! The cleansing Christ provides is greater than any other purification for three reasons. First, it came about through the eternal Spirit, by whom he offered himself. Matthew 4:1; 12:28; Luke 4:1; and Acts 1:2 each portray the Holy Spirit’s empowering Jesus for ministry. Second, he was unblemished, the importance of which is discussed in our commentary above. Third, he offered himself voluntarily to God (see Hebrews 9:26–28 and comments above). A theory from years ago is that Jesus paid the ransom (Mark 10:45) to Satan, but that’s not true. Whereas the Old Testament sacrifice would sanctify so that they are outwardly clean, the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences … so that we may serve the living God. A proper conscience is aware of the sins that separate a person from the Lord. This is the second of four instances of the writer using the word conscience. To get a better sense of the intent, compare the usage here with that of the others: Hebrews 9:9; 10:22; 13:18 (see also 10:2, where the NIV translates as “felt guilty”). The blood of Christ is qualitatively superior to the blood of animals. Therefore, the cleansing it has effected is also qualitatively superior. The old covenant dealt with an external problem of humankind and could not cleanse the interior. But Christ has brought the sacrificial system to its fulfillment, having dealt with the whole person as he or she stands before God. In “obtaining eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12, above) and having his or her conscience cleansed, the believer is now free to serve the living God.

II. Better Mediator (Hebrews 9:15–17)

A. Through Jesus’ Mediation (v. 15)

15. For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. A mediator is one who intervenes between conflicting parties to remove disagreement. In his death, Christ dealt decisively with the sins to which the old covenant law had called attention. This being so, those who are called—that is, believers in Christ—may receive the promised eternal inheritance. The expression those who are called reminds readers of the author’s designation of them as the ones “who share in the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1). Whereas possession of the land of Canaan was Israel’s inheritance under the old covenant (Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 26:52–56), those called into the new covenant have the promise of entering into eternal fellowship with God (Hebrews 4:1–11). What an inheritance!

B. Through Jesus’ Death (vv. 16, 17)

16, 17. In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. It’s easy to get confused at this point, because the Greek word rightly translated covenant/testament is the same word those native speakers use for a will. Think of someone’s “last will and testament.” Things were the same back in the first century as they are today: a will never takes effect while the one who made it is living. A will may be valid while the maker of the will lives, but the will is not operative, effective, or functional until its maker dies. So also Christ had to die in order for the new covenant to be put into effect. The Israelites had pledged their obedience to the first covenant (Exodus 19:8; 24:7), and the penalty for breaking the covenant was death (Jeremiah 34:18–20). Under the old covenant, the blood of bulls and goats was offered in place of the death the Israelites deserved. Now, in offering his righteous blood, Christ has suffered the death penalty that rightly is ours.
III. Necessary Death (Hebrews 9:18–22)

A. Dedicated in Blood (vv. 18–20)

18, 19. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. Having linked Christ’s death with the activation of the new covenant, the author returns to the role that blood played in establishing the first one. He finds proof in Exodus 24:3–8. The ceremony depicted there describes the act by which Moses consecrated the people to bring them under the old covenant. With Hebrews 9:7–14, 23–25 echoing the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16) to help explain Christ’s work, the allusion here—the ratification of the Mosaic covenant—offers another precedent for doing so. Moses had sprinkled the scroll of the covenant and all the Israelite people with the blood in order to consecrate them as God’s holy nation. Now it is Christ’s blood that sets apart his followers. 20. He said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.” The writer’s noting of Moses’ words here recalls what Jesus said as he instituted the Lord’s Supper: “This is my blood of the covenant” (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; compare Luke 22:20). That connection is all the more powerful given the original audience’s familiarity with Jesus’ words during the last supper. The original readers have recited these words numerous times during their own communion observances.

B. Remission by Blood (vv. 21, 22)

21, 22. In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. After the events of Exodus 24 to which Hebrews 9:19 alludes, Moses did indeed anoint with oil the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies (Exodus 40:9). Scripture makes no direct statement that Moses sprinkled blood on them during their dedication. Nevertheless, one may assume that he did so, since those things were to be consecrated (40:9; compare 24:6), and consecration of the priests had involved both oil and blood (29:21). The recounting of this act of consecration constitutes the first half of “lesser to greater” argument, of which Hebrews 9:23–28 comprises the second part. This argument essentially repeats and expands upon the content of Hebrews 9:12–14.

CONCLUSION

A. The Power of the Blood of Jesus

Under the old covenant, almost all things were purged by use of blood. But the new covenant features a deeper, further reaching, once-for-all cleansing through the blood of Christ. The blood of bulls and goats could never fully atone for past, present, and future sin. Ultimate salvation required the lifeblood of the Son of God. An incident centuries ago caused someone to notice that certain people were sinning against the Lord, in that they were eating meat with the blood still in it (1 Samuel 14:33). But in a figurative sense, Jesus invites us to do just that! The invitation came when he said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25). We do just that when we gather around the Lord’s table. Through Christ’s sacrifice, we have entered into a new covenant relationship with God. We have been given full access to the Father through Christ. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

PRAYER

Our Father, we are both saddened and grateful for your Son’s death on the cross. Saddened because it was our sins that put him there, but grateful that he was willing to suffer in our place. Empower us to serve him, our high priest, faithfully. We pray this in his name. Amen.