

Redemption 304: Grace and the Covenants (Part Two)



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Grace and the Covenants: Explaining New Testament Contrasts (Part Two)

Point No. 4: The Law of Moses Required Unfailing Obedience

4) The Jews who wrote the New Testament spoke of the Law of Moses as requiring total, flawless obedience on all points.

We have already seen hints of this issue. Our last section ended with an examination of Hebrews 10, which stated that under the Law of Moses sinners died “without mercy.” However, it is easy to comprehend that statement from Hebrews 10 in reference only to certain crimes and not all sins. Consequently, we will now move on to a survey of other New Testament passages that establish this particular point of the contrast.

To be clear, our thesis here is inclusive of any and all infractions of the Law of Moses, not just certain sins like murder, adultery, or idolatry. We’re not saying that all sins required the immediate death penalty according to the Law of Moses. But we are saying according to the Jewish authors of the New Testament, divine acceptance and participation in God’s promised inheritance required flawless obedience to the Law of Moses and that according to the terms of the Law of Moses any sin, no matter how small or infrequent, disqualified one from divine acceptance and God’s promised inheritance.

We begin our investigation of this line of thought in Acts 15.

Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, **That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.** 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 **And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said** unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 **And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.** 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, **which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?** 11 **But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.**

We must look at this passage in its cultural and historical setting.

First, this passage records an early issue that arose in the church as Gentiles began to accept Jesus Christ and join into the emerging Jewish fellowship of believers. As seen in verse 5, some of the Jews argued that the Gentile converts had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. When Peter speaks in verse 7, he argues for the opposing conclusion that that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised or keep the Law of Moses. Given this context, we can conclude that Peter's audience was very familiar with the Law of Moses and comprised of people with a great deal of zeal for it.

Second, the Temple is still standing at the time of this incident. The Jews, including Jewish Christians, were visiting the Temple, worshipping there, and even making offerings at times. These practices had been going on in Jerusalem for a thousand years.

Third, for our purposes, the critical statement comes in verse 10 in which Peter declares that neither his current generation nor their forefathers were "able to bear" the Law of Moses. The preceding verses focus on the argument that it was necessary to keep the Law of Moses, and in that context the phrase "unable to bear" conveys the idea of not being able to keep that Law. This meaning is confirmed in verse 11 when Peter declares that, having been unable to bear the yoke of Moses' Law, they must rely on God's grace in order to be delivered from God's wrath.

This leads us to the critical question. Certainly in the conventional view, the regulations governing Levitical sacrifices were included as part of the terms of the Law of Moses for the specific purpose of allowing the Israelites to be counted as acceptable and avoid God's wrath even when they disobeyed the Law of Moses in certain ways. But if the terms of the Law of Moses included sacrifices that compensated for certain sins of the people and allowed them to be accepted by God and avoid wrath despite such error, how could Peter assert that the Israelites had generally been unable to meet the requirements of the Law of Moses?

Here the cultural setting serves to broaden the implications, demonstrating that this is not simply Peter's own perspective. As we've noted, Peter's audience is comprised of Jewish men who are zealous for the Law of Moses. How could Peter even hope to get away with such a sweeping characterization if his audience perceived the situation under the Law of Moses was more nuanced and complex? Wouldn't someone surely say, "Peter, don't you understand that the Law of Moses included sacrifices, which allowed us to be counted faithful and escape wrath even when we sinned in certain respects?" But nobody says any such thing. Instead, a critical piece of Peter's argument goes entirely unchallenged.

This shows that not only was this Peter's perception regarding the Law of Moses but it was one shared unanimously by his Jewish audience as well, even those who were most zealous for the Law of Moses. Despite the presence of the

Levitical sacrificial system, the Jews regarded themselves as having been disqualified and in need of grace because they had failed to meet all of the terms of the Law of Moses, and any infraction constituted grounds for divine rejection and wrath, not just capital crimes.

Romans 2 is subtle but contains similar ideas.

Romans 2:13 (For **not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified...**25 **For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.** 26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, **who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?**

First, we should note here that the English words “just” and “justified” in verse 13 are the Greek words “dikaios” (Strong’s No. 1342) meaning “righteousness” and “dikaioo” (Strong’s No. 1344) meaning “to render, show, exhibit, declare, or evince to be righteous.” The reason we make note of this is because the English word “justified” tends to carry the unnecessary connotation of someone who has sinned and who becomes or is made righteous afterward. But the Greek words merely convey the simpler concept: the Law of Moses declared that righteousness was a matter of obeying its commands and by obeying its commands a man evinced or showed himself to be righteous. In other words, the idea of forgiveness of sins is not necessitated in the underlying Greek.

Second, in light of this fact, we see in verse 13 Paul’s straightforward assertion that according to the Law of Moses in order to be righteous before God, one must actually do what the Law of Moses requires. Likewise, verse 25 states that circumcision itself is nullified for those who fail to keep the commands of the Law of Moses. And verses 26-27 conversely assert that Jews who transgress the commandments of the Law of Moses will be counted by God as if they were uncircumcised Gentiles. There is no mention here of nuance in which allowances are made for breaking certain commands by means of keeping other commands, such as commands to offer sacrifices. Instead, a picture here is presented in which failure to do what was commanded resulted in the loss of righteousness, plain and simple.

Third, Paul’s comments are not just silent regarding whether the Law of Moses contained sacrifices that could justify law-breakers. Paul’s comments are incompatible with such an idea. Imagine for a moment that it was possible to transgress the Law of Moses in certain ways and yet still be regarded as righteous so long as one followed other commands to offer sacrifices. If this was the case, then there would at least be some areas in which you could be a “hearer” only, not a “doer,” and still be righteous under the Law of Moses. Likewise, it would be possible to break the law and still have circumcision count so long as you followed other instructions regarding atoning sacrifice. Paul’s statements in verse 13 and 25 become either false or grossly misleading.

The idea that the Law of Moses contained commands that could atone for transgressing other commands is also incompatible with three aspects of Romans 3.

Romans 3:20 Therefore **by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight**: for by the law is the knowledge of sin...25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare **his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past**, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. 27 **Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.** 28 **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.**

First, if Paul believed that obedience to Moses' Law did not have to be flawless but certain transgressions were tolerated by means of sacrifices, Paul could not have concluded in Romans 3:20 that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified." Under such a scenario, the sacrifices would constitute works of the Law of Moses which did indeed justify men, even those men who had transgressed the Law of Moses itself. Again, Paul's statement in chapter 3:20 would be either false or grossly misleading.

Second, we can also recall from earlier that Romans 3:25 closely parallels Hebrews 9:14, which states that by means of Jesus' death there is "redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament." These two verses testify that the transgressions of the Law of Moses had not been atoned for apart from Christ. Hebrews 9:14 is written without qualification. It does not say only particular sins from the time of Moses until the time of Christ. Rather, it speaks inclusively of sins in general from Moses until Christ. If the authors of the New Testament conceived of the Law of Moses in a way that included commands that atoned for transgressions, they could not have written that transgressions committed against the Law of Moses remained in need of atonement by Christ. Conversely, since the authors of the New Testament clearly believed that the transgressions of Moses' Law remained in need of atonement by Christ, they must not have conceived of the Law of Moses in a way that absolved transgressions. And if they conceived of the Law as devoid of a mechanism to absolve sins, they must have perceived that the Law of Moses required flawless obedience.

Third, notice the idea of "boasting" in verse 27. Boasting has to do with having done well. It makes no sense to think of a man boasting about having to offer sacrifices to compensate for his shortcomings and failings. Consequently, this boasting must be boasting about having not failed at all in respect to the Law of Moses. Since Paul connects justification by the works of the Law of Moses to boasting, we can conclude that Paul has in mind a depiction of the Law of Moses which justified only by means of flawless obedience. Therefore, a man justified by the works of the Law of Moses could boast before God because he had not failed in any regard. This again confirms that in Paul's view, the works of the Law of Moses were not atoning works.

Paul confirms his perception that righteousness by the Law of Moses meant flawless works in Romans 4.

Romans 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. **5** But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. **6** Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, **7** Saying, **Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.**

In verse 4, this chapter juxtaposes the idea of a man who has earned righteousness by means of work with the contrasting idea of righteousness based on grace. The man who is righteous based on grace, not works, is then immediately exemplified by David's description of a man whose sins have been forgiven in verse 6. In order for this contrast to work, righteousness by works of the Law of Moses and righteousness by forgiveness must be regarded by the author as mutually exclusive categories. In other words, it must be the case that the man who is saved by the works of the Law of Moses must not be a man who has been forgiven of sin. In other words, he must be without sin. Such a statement also necessarily conceives of the works of the Law of Moses in a way that does not include atoning works such as sacrifices. If the author conceived of the Law of Moses as containing atoning works such as sacrifices, then it would be possible for a man to be righteous simultaneously by both gracious forgiveness and the atoning works of the Law of Moses. The essential contrast at the heart of these verses would utterly unravel. This again demonstrates that in Paul's view, righteousness by the Law of Moses did not include sacrificial works that atoned for failure to keep other works that were commanded by the Law of Moses. When Paul talked about righteousness by works of the Law of Moses, he was not talking about a man who had been forgiven of sins but a man who was righteous by flawless works.

Romans 9 continues Paul's theme that righteousness is not by works of the Law of Moses.

Romans 9:11 (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the **purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;**) **12** It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. **13** As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. **14** What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. **15** For he saith to **Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.**
 ...**29** And as Esaias said before, **Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed,** we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha. **30** What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even **the righteousness which is of faith.** **31** **But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.** **32** **Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.**

Here we find the basic denial of salvation based on the works of the law in verse 11, although like Abraham in chapter 4, Paul is using Jewish patriarchs to demonstrate his denials concerning divine acceptance by the works of the Law of Moses. Righteousness by the works of the Law of Moses is mentioned explicitly in verses 31-32. And just like Romans 4, righteousness based on works of the law is contrasted with mercy, which is mentioned in verse 15. Verse 29 explains why the Jews were in need of mercy and that they had already received it, which is indicated when the verses states that they deserved to be left like Sodom and Gomorrah, whom the Lord had destroyed. Mercy, of course, is something that one needs when they sin. Consequently, this juxtaposition to mercy once again implies that salvation by the works of the Law of Moses did not entail forgiveness of sins, not even some sins.

A briefer statement in Romans 10 repeats the general theme.

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. 2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. 4 **For Christ is the end (5056) of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.** 5 **For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.**

Romans 10 describes the Law of Moses, saying that it entails a righteousness that is entirely about doing what the Law of Moses says, not about grace or mercy, which are ultimately found in Christ's sacrifice. Sacrifice, mercy, and grace all pertain strictly to those who have sinned and need forgiveness. By contrasting the Law of Moses to Christ in this way, Paul implies that righteousness by the Law of Moses did not include righteousness attained by works that atoned for sins, such as sacrifices, but only included righteousness by sinless, flawless obedience.

It's not surprising that these issues continue into Romans 11, which we have examined already in some detail.

Romans 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4 **But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.** 5 **Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.** 6 **And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.**

As we noted earlier, here Paul compares the Israelites of Elijah's day to his contemporary situation. Verse 5 then begins with the phrase "even so," which is the Greek word "houto" (Strong's No. 3779), meaning literally, "in this manner." Then Paul immediately goes on to say, "In this manner at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." By including the phrase "in this manner" and "in the present time also," Paul is necessitating that just as the present remnant of Israel is accepted based upon grace, the same is true for the seven thousand men in Elijah's day.

Paul's then concludes by asserting a mutually exclusive relationship between divine acceptance based on the works of the Law of Moses and divine acceptance based on grace. Since Paul's arguments have largely centered on an apologetic explaining why the Law of Moses has been superseded by the New Covenant, this mutually exclusive relationship rules out the possibility that Paul saw the Law of Moses as dispensing righteousness based on undeserved forgiveness. That would be grace. Consequently, if Paul did not see the Law of Moses as dispensing undeserved right-standing, he must have seen the righteousness of the Law of Moses as requiring flawless obedience.

As we move on to the epistle to the Galatians, we see that chapter 2 doesn't provide anything particularly novel in our investigation, but we do find something important.

Galatians 2:15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. 17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. 18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed (2647), I make myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. 21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Verse 16 simply states that no man is justified by the works of the Law of Moses. We have seen this comment more than once before. And we have already discussed how it demonstrates that the Law of Moses must have required flawless obedience, rather than tolerating certain sins and atoning for them by sacrifices. Otherwise, if forgiveness (even provisional forgiveness) was procured by certain works of the law, specifically sacrificial works, then the Law of Moses would have works that provided at least some measure of justification. Yet somehow, when Paul spoke of works of the Law of Moses, he did not include sacrificial, atoning works. However, the interesting thing about Galatians 2 is that verse 15 asserts this fact was common knowledge among the Jews at this time, an idea also seen reflected in the response (or rather lack of response) of Peter's audience in

Acts 15. Consequently, we are finding evidence of the robust, conceptual underpinning that we've theorized must have been widespread among the first-century Jews in order to explain the New Testament contrast between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

In contrast to Galatians 2, Galatians 3 begins to be very explicit concerning the requirement of flawless obedience under the Law of Moses.

Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. 12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. 13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

First, verse 10 states that “as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.” Note the phrase “as many as,” which implies widespread application of this curse. In fact, the way that Paul constructs this phrase implies here that this curse has been received by all of those who are “of the works of the law,” meaning all who seek righteousness by means of the Law of Moses or who generally operate under its commands.

Second, what does Paul mean by “under a curse?” Is he saying simply that all who are under the Law of Moses are operating under a **potential** curse looming overhead **if they sin**? Or is he saying, they **have sinned** and they are **already cursed**, not in potential but in **present reality**? The answer is repeated throughout the passage. In verse 11, Paul states that “no man is justified (righteous) by the law.” This implies that they have already been counted as sinners and, therefore, are already cursed. In verse 12, he states that “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.” The fact that they have to be redeemed confirms that they are already deserving of the consequence. If the consequence were still only a matter of potential, not something they already deserved, then they wouldn't actually need to be redeemed from it.

Third, and most importantly, why does Paul say they are cursed? Not only does verse 12 imply that it's because they have not done the works required by the Law of Moses when it says, “the man that doeth them shall live,” but verse 10 provides even more direct insight. In verse 10, Paul declares that they are cursed because they “continued not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Notice the phrase “all things” in this phrase. In the Greek, both “all” and “things” are translated from the single word “pas” (Strong's NO. 3956), which means “all” both “individually” in the sense of “each and every” and also “collectively.” Here Paul is plainly expressing his understanding that in order to be righteous, to be accepted by God, and to live, the Law of Moses required a man to faithfully do each and everything written in it. And if they did not,

according to verse 13, the curse was not removed by any aspect of the Law of Moses but remained upon them until Christ.

In Galatians 5, we find another explicit remark on this topic.

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. **2** Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. **3** For I testify again to **every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.** **4** Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Verse 3 says plainly that the Jews are obligated to do the “whole” law. Certainly, this suggests an obligation to keep the Law of Moses flawlessly in all of its precepts to retain righteousness rather than allowing some of the precepts to be broken and compensated for by other means.

Chapter 6 contains another relevant statement, although it is less explicitly related.

Galatians 6:13 For **neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised,** that they may glory in your flesh.

In verse 13, Paul states that those who are circumcised do not keep the Law of Moses. For sure, they must have kept some of it, even most of it. And at the time this was written, they were still offering the sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses. Wouldn't these sacrifices count as works of the law that compensated for their disobedience? Even if they failed in some respects but kept most of the Law of Moses including the commands to sacrifices, shouldn't they have been counted as having kept the Law of Moses, especially if the sacrifices were the law's own allotted means for compensating for such transgressions?

Hebrews 8 attests to this requirement of flawless obedience as well.

Hebrews 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. **8** For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: **9** 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 continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not,** saith the Lord. **10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: **11** And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. **12** **For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I**

remember no more. 13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

In verses 7-9, the author states that God found fault with the Jews “because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not.” Notice that this is phrased as a past event that continued to into the present until the work of Christ and the New Covenant. In contrast, the author quotes an Old Testament prophecy in which God speaks of a future time when he will “be merciful to their unrighteousness” and no longer remember their sins. This affirms that up until the time of Christ, each infraction against the Law of Moses counted and resulted in God not regarding his people despite the presence of atoning sacrifices. Consequently, flawless obedience was the only way to retain God’s regard and be counted as keeping the Law of Moses.

Lastly, we come to James 2. Like Paul, James is very explicit.

James 2:8 If ye fulfil **the royal law** according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: 9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, **and are convinced of the law as transgressors.** 10 **For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.** 11 **For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.** 12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by **the law of liberty.**

In verse 10, he states simply, “whosoever shall keep the whole of the law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Then he proceeds to quote examples from the Law of Moses, particularly from the Ten Commandments. But the really important point here is that, according to James, breaking what might have been considered “forgivable” aspects of the Law of Moses, aspects that theoretically could have been covered by sacrifices, automatically rendered one guilty of breaking all of the Law of Moses, even the capital offenses which were the unforgivable sins under the Law of Moses (since they required immanent death as a penalty). There seems to be no room for anything other than a requirement of flawless obedience in order to avoid guilt and remain righteous under means of the Law of Moses.

In light of the scriptures we have examined throughout this section, we are forced to conclude that the Jews who wrote the New Testament did not believe that Law of Moses allowed a man to remain righteous as long as he obeyed most commands and offered sacrifices to compensate for breaking other commands. Instead, they described the Law of Moses as requiring total, flawless obedience on each and every point. Otherwise right-standing with God was forfeit by a single infraction of any kind.

Reconciling the Facts

At this point, we have established several important facts defining how the Jewish authors of the New Testament conceptualized the Law of Moses.

First, of course, is the historical and cultural setting of their remarks. These men lived in a time when the Temple still stood in Jerusalem and sacrifices and offerings were still being made there. In fact, not only had they lived under the Law of Moses and been required to keep its commands their entire lives prior to Christ, but they themselves along with many other members of the Jewish Christians living in and around the area of Jerusalem continued to go to the Temple and worship there, even participating in offerings, until the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. These traits are particularly true of Paul himself who wrote many of the most explicit comments dismissing justification by the works of the Law of Moses. Consequently, as we attempt to understand what they said concerning the Law of Moses, we must start with the assumption that they were neither ignorant of its precepts, nor brashly or cavalierly antagonistic toward it.

Second, there are the remarks themselves.

These Jewish authors repeatedly spoke of the Law of Moses as a covenant without grace or faith. They describe the Law of Moses as requiring flawless obedience without a single instance of transgression on any point. They also describe the Law of Moses as an instrument for dispensing condemnation and death and, with the exception of Hebrews, never as containing commands for sacrifices and offerings that dispense forgiveness. And they flatly deny that the works of Law of Moses were able to attain forgiveness, election, salvation, or the promises of God. With over 60 references to atoning sacrifices in Exodus, Numbers, and Leviticus alone, how could Jewish men who grew up required to keep the Law of Moses, who lived near the Temple where sacrifices took place, who participated in Temple worship and offerings even after accepting Christ Jesus, describe the Law of Moses as merely dispensing death, requiring unfailing obedience, and devoid of works that could procure forgiveness and justification?

Were they mistaken or was there a clear, robust understanding in place at the time that created a natural setting for such assessments? And if so, what kind of conceptual underpinning would have to be in place in order to explain such statements?

A Partial Explanation from Hebrews

The title for this section is in some sense a misnomer, or at least an oversimplification. Although it is the most in-depth analysis of the topic, Hebrews is not the only book of the New Testament, which describes the work of Christ Jesus as a fulfillment of certain Old Testament sacrifices. The first hints of this doctrine begin in the gospels themselves, starting from Jesus' own teaching.

Early traces of this teaching can be found in Matthew 16, Mark 8, Luke 9, and Luke 17. These verses record how Jesus began to teach his disciples that he would

be killed by the chief priests and elders. They do not, however, identify any particular pre-existing sources or traditions that might have contained this idea before the time of Christ.

Matthew 16:21 From that time forth **began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go** unto Jerusalem, and **suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed**, and be raised again the third day.

Mark 8:31 And he **began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed**, and after three days rise again.

Luke 9:21 And he straitly charged them, and commanded *them* to tell no man that thing; 22 Saying, **The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain**, and be raised the third day. 23 And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Luke 17:24 For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. 25 **But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.**

Notice the basic premise in each of these four passages is the necessity for Jesus not only to be killed but that at least some of the chief priests had to be instrumental in his death. Here we have the first traces of the idea that Jesus' death would relate to the pattern of sacrificial animals killed by the priests even as commanded under the Law of Moses.

And although the statements in the passages above are brief, we will see that their language directly connects to later passages, which are explicit about the Old Testament source material. Likewise, even Matthew 16 is not entirely without a hint in this regard. In verse 21, the word "to show" is the Greek word "deiknuo" which literally means to "to show" but metaphorically means, "to give evidence or proof of a thing." The inclusion of this word relates to later passages, which refer to Old Testament scriptures as the source of this teaching. Here Jesus is described as giving evidence for this teaching, although the evidence is not specifically identified in these passages. That evidence will be in nearby passages.

In fact, in the very next chapter of both Matthew and Mark, the identity of the pre-existing evidence cited for this doctrine begins to be uncovered.

Matthew 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, **Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?** 11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, **Elias truly shall first come**, and restore all things. 12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. **Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.**

Mark 9:11 And they asked him, saying, **Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?** 12 And he answered and told them, **Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.**

Both Matthew 17 and Mark 9 begin with a reference to what “the scribes say.” This is a reference to what had already been written by the times of the Jesus and his disciples. In other words, Jesus’ followers are asking him about traditions that existed in their day concerning the prophet Elijah.

In his response, Jesus not only affirms the veracity of what the scribes had written, but he also draws a parallel the rejection of Elijah and the rejection of the Son of Man, the Christ. Although these passages do not refer overtly to the death of the Christ, they do discuss his suffering and, therefore, connect invariably to the previous chapters which discuss those sufferings as part of his death at the hands of some of the chief priests and other leaders of Israel.

The most pertinent part of these two passages comes in Mark 9:12 in which Jesus plainly states that “it is written” that “the Son of man must suffer many things.” Here we have the first of several direct attestations that Jesus’ death was seen as a fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures.

But this is not the last that Matthew and Mark have to say on this subject. Nor have we heard the last from Luke for that matter. The following passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the last supper shared by Christ and his disciples before his death. As we can see, each account depicts this supper as a celebration of the Jewish festival known as Passover. More importantly, in each passage Jesus depicts his impending death not only in direct relation to the New Covenant but as fulfilling the Passover ritual. While the passages we’ve surveyed above depicted Jesus’ death as a fulfillment of Old Testament scripture, by referring to Passover these passages explicitly identify Jesus’ death as a fulfillment of sacrificial rituals governed by the Law of Moses.

Matthew 26:17 Now the first *day* of the *feast of unleavened bread* **the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?** 18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; **I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.** 19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they **made ready the passover.** 20 Now when the even was come, **he sat down with the twelve...**26 **And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.** 27 **And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;** 28 **For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.** 29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.

Mark 14:12 And the first day of unleavened bread, **when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?** 13 And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. 14 And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where **I shall eat the passover with my disciples?** 15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished *and* prepared: there make ready for us. 16 And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and **they made ready the passover.** 17 And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. 22 And as **they did eat, Jesus took bread,** and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, **Take, eat: this is my body.** 23 **And he took the cup,** and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and **they all drank of it.** 24 **And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.** 25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Luke 24:14 And when the hour was come, **he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.** 15 And he said unto them, **With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:** 16 **For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.** 17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among yourselves: 18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. 19 **And he took bread,** and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, **This is my body which is given for you:** this do in remembrance of me. 20 **Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.**

After the resurrection of Jesus, we find him reminding his disciples of these teachings and expounding in great detail.

Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, **These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me.** 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand **the scriptures,** 46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

The opening phrase in verse 44 states, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you.” This statement connects verse 44 directly back to the less explicit passages we saw in Matthew 16-17, Mark 8-9, and Luke 9 and 17 in which Jesus showed his disciples that the Old Testament scriptures required his death. Although Luke 24 provides us with spectacular detail by identifying the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the writings of the prophets among books that foretold his death, none of these passages, including Luke 24, tells us exactly what the Old Testament scriptures said about the matter. However, the

descriptions of the last supper in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 24 provide at least one preeminent example. Jesus' fulfilled the sacrificial rituals of the Passover, a festival commemorating deliverance from slavery and the angel of death by means of blood sacrifice.

Our survey so far has concentrated on brief but clear remarks from the synoptic gospels, but John's gospel also corroborates this understanding. In the opening chapter of John's gospel, John the Baptist twice identifies Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Such language clearly describes Jesus' death in terms of Old Testament sacrificial rituals of propitiation and atonement.

John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world...**36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, **Behold the Lamb of God!**

In Romans 3, Paul plainly identifies Jesus' death and shed blood as the means of propitiation. The word for "propitiation" here is the Greek term ("hilasterion," Strong's No. 2435) that was used to describe the cover of the Ark of the Covenant where (according to the Online Bible Greek Lexicon) the Jewish people "sprinkled the blood of the expiatory victim on the annual day of atonement." This terminology is clearly intended to depict Christ's death as the pinnacle sacrifice to which the sacrificial animals on the Day of Atonement are connected.

Romans 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through **the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (2435) through faith in his blood,** to declare his righteousness **for the remission of sins that are past,** through the forbearance of God.

Paul has more to say on this topic, but before we continue with Paul, we need to take a brief detour to John's first epistle. In chapters 2 and 4, the Apostle John uses language closely related to Romans 3:25 when he refers to Jesus as a propitiation for our sins, ("hilasmos," Strong's No. 2434). Clearly, this was an established concept in the eyes of both Paul and John.

1 John 2:2 And **he is the propitiation for our sins:** and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and **sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

Resuming our examination of Paul's writings, we turn next to 1 Corinthians. Picking up on Jesus' own teaching at the last supper, here we find a simple but clear assertion that the death of Christ functions as a Passover sacrifice for our sins.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even **Christ our passover is sacrificed (2380) for us.**

Although “sins” are not mentioned specifically in 1 Corinthians 5, within the context of New Testament theology (as exhibited in the other passages discussed in this section), the phrase “sacrificed for us” certainly implies that this language entails redemption from sin. But in any case, the use of the Greek term “thuo” (Strong’s No. 2380), which means sacrifice, clearly demonstrates that this passage is describing Christ’s death in terms of the offerings commanded under the Law of Moses.

(In the addendum at the end of this paper, we will discuss 2 Corinthians 5:21, which also relates to the theme of this section. However, due to the slight complexity involved in its interpretation, the analysis 2 Corinthians is being postponed until later for the sake of continuity and brevity.)

Peter’s first epistle also includes language attesting to this teaching. In chapter 1:2, Peter describes God’s elect as having been “sprinkled of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and **sprinkling (4473) of the blood of Jesus Christ:** Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied...

This Greek word for “sprinkled” is used in several times in Hebrews 9.

Hebrews 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling (4472) the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh... 18 Whereupon neither the first *testament* was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled (4472) both the book, and all the people, 20 Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. 21 Moreover he sprinkled (4472) with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

As we can see, Hebrews 9 uses this word “sprinkled” when describing the blood of animals that were sacrificed to dedicate the Sinai Covenant, the Law of Moses. In fact, the excerpt above ends with verse 22, which relates the sprinkling with blood from sacrifices to the remission of sins just as verse 13 speaks of the “unclean” and “purifying of the flesh.” Since Peter uses the same word for “sprinkling,” we know that the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood mentioned in 1 Peter is meant to compare Jesus’ death to sacrificial animals during the Law of Moses.

The Book of Hebrews is certainly the centerpiece of this section, so we’ll return to take an in-depth examination of several more chapters in a moment. But before we move on to Hebrews, we’d also like to take note of a very prominent feature in the Book of Revelation. We recall from earlier that John’s gospel began with two

declarations by John the Baptist (John 1:29, 36) that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world...**36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, **Behold the Lamb of God!**

Consequently, it is no surprise to find that throughout the Book of Revelation, John frequently refers to Jesus by the term “the Lamb.” Particularly noteworthy is Revelation 5:6, which is not only the first occurrence of this title in Revelation but also connects the title with Jesus’ death as seen in the phrase “a Lamb as it had been slain.” This clearly compares Jesus to a lamb slaughtered in so many of the sacrifices mandated under the Law of Moses. Also worth highlighting is chapter 14:4, which uses this title in connection with Jesus’ redemption of men.

Revelation 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, **stood a Lamb as it had been slain**, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Revelation 7:10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto **the Lamb**.

Revelation 7:17 For **the Lamb** which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Revelation 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow **the Lamb** whithersoever he goeth. **These were redeemed from among men, being** the firstfruits unto God and to **the Lamb**.

Revelation 14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of **the Lamb**.

Revelation 15:3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of **the Lamb**, saying, Great and marvellous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints.

Revelation 19:9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the **marriage supper of the Lamb**. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Revelation 21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and **the Lamb** are the temple of it.

Revelation 21:23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and **the Lamb** is the light thereof.

Revelation 22:1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of **the Lamb**.

Revelation 22:3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of **the Lamb** shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.

As we can see, there are many different authors and books of the New Testament that assert the doctrine that Jesus' death stands as a sort of pinnacle sacrifice identified with general Old Testament sacrifices for forgiveness and with the Passover sacrifices in particular. However, as we turn our attention to the Book of Hebrews, we will see that the Book of Hebrews does something that these other passages have not done. While other passages described Jesus as a "propitiation for our sins," as the "Lamb of God who takes away sins," as "our Passover," and as something foretold in the Law of Moses, Hebrews will add specificity to this connection and explain the relationship directly.

In addition, Hebrews will do something that so far we haven't seen any other New Testament book do at any point in this study. It will connect the sacrifices performed by the Levitical priesthood prior to Christ directly to the Law of Moses, which will be very important when it comes to shaping our overall model.

We'll start our examination of Hebrews with chapter 7. Even though Hebrews 7 itself does not explain the relationship between Jesus' death and Old Testament sacrifices, it does lead us into a series of chapters that do so. Along the way, Hebrews 7 once again affirms the basic premise that Jesus' death is analogous to the "daily" sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests. And consequently, it also lays the foundation for connecting the Old Testament sacrifices, at least in some way, to the Law of Moses, something we have not yet seen in other passages.

Hebrews 7:11 If therefore perfection were by **the Levitical priesthood**, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need *was there* that **another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?**...24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. 26 **For such an high priest** became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; 27 **Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's:** for this he did once, **when he offered up himself**.

Although we've largely limited our analysis of chapter 7 to verses 24-27, we have included verse 11 because it identifies for us that this passage includes a discussion of the Levites, particularly Aarons' family, who were designated to serve as the priests under the Law of Moses. The text presents Jesus as a member

of another order of priests, which predates the Levites, is identified with Melchizedek and is, for these reasons, superior to the Levitical priests.

Verse 26 describes Jesus as a high priest categorically similar to the Levitical high priests. And verse 27 likewise presents Jesus as offering up a sacrifice just as “those high priests” used to offer sacrifices when the Law of Moses was in operation. In fact, the previous high priests are depicted as offering numerous, repeated sacrifices but the same goal was satisfied once and for all by the single act of Jesus’ death. Clearly, here we have the basic idea that previous sacrifices were similar to Jesus’ death but ultimately ineffectual and, therefore, that Jesus’ death fulfills the concept portrayed but never accomplished by these sacrifices performed by the Levites under the Law of Moses. Still, the next few chapters will be even more explicit on this point.

Hebrews 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. 3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. 4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: 5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. 6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

Chapter 8 picks up right where chapter 7 ends and continues with the phrase, “of the things which we have spoken this is the sum.” Like chapter 7, chapter 8 continues to describe Jesus as a high priest analogous to the Levitical high priests under the Law of Moses. However, there are three more pertinent items to note from chapter 8.

First, verse 3 is critical because with verse 3 comes the onset of the New Testament’s specific explanation of the relationship between Old Testament priestly sacrifices and Jesus’ death, which so far have been connected to one another but without elucidation of the particulars of the relationship. The relevant aspect of verse 3 is that it states that “every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices.” This is a clear reference to the Levitical priests and their sacrifices. But then the second half of verse 3 notes that because of these ordained sacrificial practices of the Levitical priests “wherefore it is of necessity” that Jesus as our high priest must also offer some sacrifice. In short, the priestly sacrifices created a pattern that Jesus “of necessity” had to follow and fulfill. Although not as direct as later verses, which we will examine momentarily, this phrasing depicts the relationship between Old Testament sacrifices and Jesus’ death as one in which the Old Testament sacrifices are less sufficient precursors of the sacrifice offered sufficiently by Christ’s death. We recall that this sufficiency issue has already been established in chapter 7, when verse 27 stated that with one sacrifice

Jesus accomplished what was not accomplished by the multitude of sacrifices offered day after day by the priests.

Second, note the word “ordained” in the first half of verse 3. This can be connected to verse 4, which states, “there are priests that offer gifts according to the law.” We might also include verse 5, which mentions how “Moses was admonished of God.” This last phrase is a reference to Exodus 25:40 and it most certainly about the vision of the tabernacle, not to the Law of Moses in general. But it identifies the setting when these “ordinations” were put in place as the timeframe of the Exodus when the Law of Moses was given. Verse 3 and 4 are, of course, about the Law of Moses in general and speak of how Moses commanded in the law that there should be priests (from among the Levites) who offer sacrifices. This is the first explicit remark that we have seen so far in this study directly asserting that the Old Testament sacrifices were occurring as part of the commandments of the Law of Moses, a fact which in and of itself is somewhat extraordinary especially in contrast to the countless other times that the New Testament authors refer to the Law of Moses.

Third, although it occurs in reference to the tabernacle, the phrase “the example and shadow of heavenly things” is important to our investigation. As we will see, not only the tabernacle, but the sacrifices and the priesthood itself are presented as a “foreshadowing” of the Jesus’ priesthood and sacrificial death. We’ve already seen this idea of foreshadowing in the phrase “wherefore it is of necessity” in verse 3 and in the sufficiency comparison of chapter 7:27. But here it is getting introduced in explicit terms. And, of course, since the tabernacle by its very nature serves to facilitate priestly intercession and sacrifices, even this phrase in verse 5 can be seen in relation to the priestly work and death of Jesus Christ, despite its central focus on the tabernacle.

Chapter 9 adds even more explicitness on these points.

Hebrews 9:1 Then verily **the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.** 2 For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. 3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; 4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. 6 **Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.** 7 **But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:** 8 **The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:** 9 **Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;** 10 **Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances,**

imposed on them until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; **12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. 16 For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. 18 Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, 20 Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. 21 Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. 23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; 26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.**

First, chapter 9 is replete with assertions that the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood weren't just concurrent with the Law of Moses but were prescribed by the Law of Moses.

Verse 1 states that "the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary." The Greek word translated here as "divine service" is "latreia" (Strong's No. 2999), which means "the service and worship of God according to the requirements of Levitical law." The same word is used again in verse 6 where it is used inclusively of the Levitical priests entering into the tabernacle to offer sacrifices of blood for the errors of the people.

But even more relevant to our point is the word "ordinances," which appears not only in verse 1 but also later in verse 10. This is the Greek word "dikaioma" (Strong's No. 1345), which in some contexts refers to righteousness, but is

primarily defined as “that which has been deemed right so as to have force of law” or “what has been established, and ordained by law, an ordinance.”

The use of these words confirms that the Law of Moses did mandate such priestly sacrifices. Again, this may not seem all that unexpected in general, modern perception. But as we have seen, these statements in Hebrews are the only texts in the New Testament that directly describe such sacrifices as commandments from Moses’ Law.

(Note: We might initially consider the use of the word “ordained” in verse 6 as well. However, this is the Greek word “kataskeuazo” (Strong’s No. 2680), which means “to furnish, equip, prepare, or make ready.” Consequently, verse 6 doesn’t necessarily speak of things that were commanded under the Law of Moses. Instead, verse 6 merely states that the priests went in to the tabernacle after the tabernacle and its instruments were furnished or prepared.)

Second, we turn our attention next to verse 8, where we find the phrase “The Holy Ghost this signifying.” The term “signifying” is the Greek word “deloo” (Strong’s No. 1213), which means “to make manifest” or “to make known by relating.” This idea of “signifying” or “relating” refers to the “meaning” behind what is described in verses 6-7. In other words, here we find an identification of the meaning of the priestly sacrificial rituals performed for the errors of the people. Verse 9 similarly begins with the phrase “Which was a figure for the time then present.” The Greek word here is “parabole” (Strong’s No. 3850), which means “a placing of one thing by the side of another,” and conveys the idea of “a comparison of one thing with another, likeness.” In fact, as the spelling of the Greek word might suggest, this is the same word translated throughout the gospels into the English word “parable” whenever Jesus began to teach the crowds using analogies. Verses 9-10 include offerings, sacrifices, diverse washings, and other ordinances in this parable or figure. Consequently, here we can see that the priestly ritual of bringing sacrifices into the tabernacle under the Law of Moses as well as many other priestly rituals are said to be an analogy.

And according to verses 11-12, the Holy Spirit intended these things to be an analogy conceptually illustrating Christ Jesus, who similarly took his own blood into a heavenly tabernacle just as these priests took the blood of goats and calves into the earthy tabernacle.

Third, we should take note of verse 25. Like chapter 7:27, verse 25 compares Christ’s sacrifice to the Old Testament sacrifices. When we collect the comparisons in these two verses, we find that the comparison is made on three levels. Number one, the priests had to offer many, many sacrifices repeatedly in the Old Testament. Christ only had to be sacrificed once. Number two, the Old Testament priests had to offer up sacrifices for their own sins. Christ was sinless (Hebrews 4:15, 9:28). Number three, all previous priests had to offer the “blood of others.” Christ presented his own blood. It is important to note that on all three levels, Christ’s sacrifice is presented as superior to the work of these priests and their sacrifices. Categorically they are similar, but the Old Testament sacrifices

are only a partial measure compared to Christ. Consequently, Hebrews 9 has further established that the sacrifices of the Old Testament period were impartial analogies intended to depict a work that was perfectly completed once and for all by the death of Christ Jesus. Simply put, those sacrifices illustrate his sacrifice. They are parables of Christ's work.

Fourth, verse 13 is critical to our discussion because it utilizes a hypothetical argument as part of this comparison. It begins with the phrase, "if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh." This statement continues in verse 14, which concludes, "How much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your conscience." This hypothetical in verse 13 is the closest that we have seen any New Testament passage come to affirming any purifying or sanctifying power of the sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses. Up to this point, we have seen nothing but firm and clear denials that either grace or forgiveness was administered by the works of the Law of Moses in any degree. Such phrases as "a man is not justified by the works of the law" and "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" are just two examples of these denials. Moreover, Hebrews 9 not only affirms the sanctifying and purifying element of the animal sacrifices prior to Christ, but as we have seen, it does so in a way that identifies those Old Testament sacrifices directly as ordinances of Moses' Law, which is another thing we have not seen anywhere else in the New Testament so far.

The important question here is whether the purifying capacity of animal blood is intended as a mere hypothetical used to make or emphasize his point. Or, does the author himself regard this as more than a hypothetical, as a real fact of history, as effective at least to some degree?

Likewise, in verse 20-22 the author again directly infers the capacity of animal sacrifices to purify. In verse 22, he states, "almost all things are by the law purged with blood." And in verse 23, he plainly states that "the pattern of things in the heavens" (by which he means, the earthly tabernacle apparatus) "should be purged with these" animal sacrifices. Yet the heavenly tabernacle, upon which the earthly tabernacle was patterned, was purified by the blood of Christ Jesus as declared in the end of verse 23 and on into verse 24.

Ultimately, verse 13 and verses 22-23 are the most pertinent to our discussion because they touch on the question of the effectiveness of animal sacrifices to attain human atonement. We have repeatedly seen the New Testament deny that the works of the Law of Moses dispensed grace or provided forgiveness for sins, so this would be an unexpected and potentially divergent assertion in Hebrews 9. How would we reconcile Hebrews 9 with what we've seen in John's gospel, Acts, Romans and so many other epistles, which deny the role of undeserved right-standing based on grace in the Law of Moses?

Fortunately, chapter 10 is going to answer these questions for us immediately. And what we will find is that Hebrews is in perfect accord with what we've seen from John's gospel, Acts, Romans, and the other epistles. This contextual insight

from chapter 10 will shed light on exactly what the author intended in verse 13 and verses 22-23 of chapter 9.

Hebrews 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. **2** For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. **3** But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. **4** For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. **5** Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: **6** In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. **7** Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. **8** Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; **9** Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. **He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.** **10** By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. **11** **And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:** **12** But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; **13** From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. **14** For **by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.** **15** Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, **16** This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; **17** **And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.** **18** **Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.** **19** Having therefore, brethren, **boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,** **20** By a new and living way, which **he hath consecrated for us,** through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; **21** And having an high priest over the house of God; **22** 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.

First, we should begin our analysis of chapter 10 with verse 1, which plainly identifies the sacrifices of animals as “a shadow of good things to come.” Like previous references to animal sacrifices as a parable, this verse confirms that the purpose of these sacrifices was to point to Christ and was only fulfilled in Christ. In this sense, Hebrews is expressing a thought that is parallel to John 1, which states, “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The idea here is the same. In the Law, Moses gave commands that illustrated Christ, but the reality itself, the true expression of these things, comes by Christ himself.

Second, as we can also see, Hebrews 10 is quite explicit, particularly concerning the capacity for animal sacrifices under the Law of Moses to obtain forgiveness. Verse 1 states that the animal sacrifices, which were only an image or parable to

the sacrifice of Christ, “can never make the comers perfect.” Verse 2 offers proof for this conclusion by explaining that if those sacrifices had satisfied God’s purpose, then those sacrifices could have stopped at some point after having accomplished their goal. Instead, as verse 3 describes, the animal sacrifices had to be made repeatedly, which demonstrates their insufficiency both individually and collectively. And verse 4 reasserts that the unending need for these sacrifices demonstrates that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” For this reason, verse 8 summarizes that those sacrifices, offerings, burnt offerings and offerings for sin did not ultimately satisfy God as far as sin was concerned. And verse 11 again states plainly that the offerings and sacrifices made daily by the priests under the Law of Moses “can never take away sins.” Consequently, verses 5, 9-10, 12, 14, and 19-20 explain that by the sacrifice of his own body, Jesus forever satisfied God’s purpose and redeemed sinners, taking away their sins.

Of course, how do these repeated, explicit remarks denying the atoning power of Levitical sacrifices reconcile with what we’ve seen in nearby verses from chapter 9?

Let’s begin with chapter 9:13-14, which asks, “if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, How much more shall the blood of Christ?” Does this imply that the blood of animals did “purify the flesh?” The clear denials in chapter 10 force us to interpret these verses in chapter 9 as a rhetorical hypothetical. The author isn’t affirming that the blood of bulls and goats does indeed sanctify to purification. Rather, he is arguing that those who regard the blood of animals as sufficient cannot deny the surpassing sufficiency of the blood of an innocent human being. In other words, you cannot deny the logic driving the need for human blood while affirming the logic of animal blood. So long as verse 13 remains a rhetorical technique based on the views of his opposition and not the author expressing his own view, there is no conflict between chapter 9:13 and these numerous, plain denials in chapter 10.

But, what about verses 22-23 of chapter 9?

First, verse 22 states that “almost all things are by the law purged with blood.” Here the preposition “by” is the Greek word “kata” (Strong’s 2596), which means, “according to.” Consequently, verse 22 is simply saying that “according to the Law of Moses almost all things are purged by blood.” Or, in other words, the author is arguing that even the Law of Moses itself teaches that blood is necessary for purification. The author’s intent is not to argue that the blood of animals sacrificed under Moses’ Law is sufficient to accomplish purification (a fact which he denies directly in chapter 10). Rather, the author’s point here is to use Moses’ demand for blood as part of his ongoing proof that the blood of Jesus was ultimately required. In this light, verse 22 poses no particular difficulty.

Second, verse 23 states that, “It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these.” Does this mean that the earthly tabernacle constructed under Moses was indeed purified by animal sacrifices?

Number one, it must be noted that verses 21-24 are discussing the tabernacle and its instruments, not people. This is indicated by three phrases. One, verse 21 identifies “the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.” Two, verse 23 uses the phrase “the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified by these.” (The word “these” of course refers to the blood of calves and goats as mentioned in verse 20.) And three, verse 24 contrasts to verse 23 by describing how Christ entered into the “holy places” that exist in heaven and were not made by man. In other words, verses 21-24 are discussing the purification of heavenly things and the earthly counterparts that were made in the likeness of those heavenly things. Clearly human beings do not have counterparts in heaven that are in need of purification. So, ultimately these verses aren’t talking about the purification of human beings, but about purification of inanimate objects. And consequently, it is difficult to argue that effective atonement for sin is even in view in verses 21-24, including the critical phrasing in verse 23.

However, verse 19 does mention the sprinkling of “all the people.” Since the surrounding context does contain more general statements that include purification from sin even if verses 21-24 do not, we should at least address the potential implications if verse 23 is applied to human purification.

First, we need to look back at verse 20, which cites the Old Testament as saying, “This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.” This phrase “enjoined unto you” is the source of the phrase “by the law” in verse 22 and the phrase “It was therefore necessary” in verse 23. God had enjoined the Law of Moses upon the people of Israel and that Law contained commands that required them to use animal blood to purify things including the tabernacle and its instruments.

Second, the enjoining of the Law of Moses explains how the author of Hebrews can regard animal sacrifices as insufficient and yet write about their necessity for purifying certain things. Simply put, the necessity to purify earthly things with animal sacrifices was not due to their sufficiency or to some metaphysical necessity. Rather, the need to use animal sacrifice to purify things was a “need” created by the commands of Moses’ Law.

Third, for the author of Hebrews the inherent illustrative function of the parable is the reason that God made the use of animal sacrifices necessary for the purification of earthly things. This inherent illustrative function is also the reason that God had to count those earthly things as pure because of those animal sacrifices. It wasn’t that God counted the animal blood as sufficient and on that basis counted the earthly items as purified because animal blood was sufficient. Rather, we have repeatedly seen the author of Hebrews describe animal sacrifices as “parables” that “signify,” as “patterns,” and as “shadows of good things to come.” If God had not counted the earthly items as purified by animal sacrifices, despite

the insufficiency of those sacrifices, then the illustrative purpose of the analogy would have been destroyed. How could God use animal sacrifices to illustrate how the blood of Christ will be necessary to purify if God doesn't regard the animal sacrifices as purifying? Instead of conveying that a sufficient blood sacrifice would be accepted for atonement, God would be communicating that blood sacrifices accomplish nothing. Consequently, in order to maintain the illustration, God has to count the animal sacrifices as sufficient at least temporarily until that ultimate sacrifice illustrated by the animal blood is accomplished.

Fourth, this temporal relationship in which animal sacrifices are accepted provisionally despite their insufficiency is demonstrated throughout these passages in Hebrews. As we have seen, Hebrews always focusses on the animal sacrifices that occurred before Christ in history. In fact, many sacrifices must be offered over and over again throughout history prior to Christ because at no point did they accomplish atonement. If they had accomplished this goal, Hebrews argues that the animal sacrifices would not have needed to continue day after day, year after year. Consequently, these remarks from Hebrews also indicate that because animal offerings continued to be necessary throughout the Old Testament period, forgiveness of sins had not been attained by them. In other words, animal sacrifices failed to effectively attain forgiveness of sins. But, Hebrews has been equally clear that the single occurrence of the death of Christ forever accomplished atonement and brought an end to the preceding need for animal sacrifices. Chapter 10:18 declares "where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." In other words, since Jesus had attained forgiveness for men's sins, animal offerings for sin are no longer needed.

Moreover, not only does the author's recounting of history describe animal sacrifices as temporary and ending with Christ, but the author's description of animal sacrifices as an illustrative analogy to the death of Christ also affirms this inherent temporary relationship. It was not only necessary that the analogy of animal sacrifices must come first in order instruct and prepare men for Christ but also that the coming of the death of Christ would by necessity end the need for the illustration to continue.

Both historically and functionally, the efficiency of animal sacrifices is temporary and their temporary purpose is only actually satisfied by Christ's death, which ends the need for the death of animals. In other words, animal sacrifices were accepted because they depicted the ultimate sacrifice of Christ but this acceptance was only temporary and illustrative until the time of Christ's death. These sacrifices were neither permanently nor inherently effective on their own. Nor is Hebrews describing their efficiency as anything other than temporary, illustrative, and fulfilled only by means Christ's death.

In summary, chapter 10's explicit denials of the effectiveness of animal sacrifices reveal that chapter 9:13-14 was not meant to assert that animal blood was sufficient to purify the flesh. Rather, chapter 9:13-14 was meant as a rhetorical hypothetical intended to demonstrate how even an opponents' insistence on the

need for the blood of animals itself supports the ultimate need for the sacrifice of human blood. Likewise, chapter 10's explicit denials also reveal that chapter 9:22-23 was not intended to convey that animal blood was necessary because it was sufficient on its own for purification. Rather, chapter 9:22-23 conveys that animal blood had to be used for purification in order to establish and maintain an instructional analogy regarding the purifying power of the blood of Christ.

In fact, Hebrews 13 confirms these conclusions.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. 9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For *it is* a good thing that the heart **be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.** 10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. 11 For **the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary** by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. 12 **Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood,** suffered without the gate. 13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

Verse 9 speaks of the heart being “established with grace, not with meats.” While it is clear from verse 9 that these “meats” have “not profited them that have been occupied therein,” it is perhaps less clear what the term “meats” refers to here. Thankfully, verse 11 clarifies by identifying those “meats” with “the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary.” Once again, verse 12 immediately cites the necessary parallel between these animals and Jesus. Just as the animals’ blood is used for sin and the animals’ bodies were destroyed outside the city or encampment, likewise Jesus’ blood sanctifies the people and he too died outside the gate of the city. These short verses restate both of the foundational components of our conclusions. Number one, animal sacrifices ultimately do not profit or benefit men so far as the atonement for sin is concerned. And number two, these animal sacrifices do benefit men in so much as they stand in as temporary, instructional substitutes for the only sufficient sacrifice, the death of Christ Jesus.

Moreover, this view that the effectiveness of animal sacrifices is “borrowed from” the blood of a singular human sacrifice is not unique to the Jews who wrote the New Testament. Other Jews have also held to this idea. Consider the quotes below from such sources as Encyclopedia Britannica and the Jewish Encyclopedia.

Akedah, (Hebrew: “Binding”) referring to **the binding of Isaac as related in Genesis 22**. Abraham bound his son Isaac on an altar at Moriah, as he had been instructed by God. **An angel stopped Abraham when he was about to slay his son and replaced Isaac with a ram**; this is the last of the 10 trials to which God subjected Abraham. Abraham here exemplifies obedience and Isaac embodies the martyr in Judaism. **Because 2 Chronicles 3:1 refers to Moriah as the mountain on which the Temple is built, the story further explains the site of the Temple of Jerusalem. Building the Temple there invokes the binding of Isaac as**

source of merit: God is asked to remember Abraham's faithfulness and thereby to show mercy to his children. The sounding of the ram's horn, or shofar, is also meant to elicit remembrance in the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) rite. On fast days, synagogue prayer includes, **"Remember for us the covenant and loving kindness and oath that you swore to Abraham our father on Mount Moriah, consider the binding with which Abraham our father bound his son Isaac on the altar, suppressing his compassion so as to do your will, so may your compassion outweigh your anger against us."** Christianity found in the binding of Isaac an archetype for the sacrifice of Jesus (Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 3:18). –

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1529144/Akedah>

Akedah – 'Akedah, ("The binding or sacrifice of Isaac"): - **This Biblical incident plays an important part in the Jewish liturgy. The earliest allusion to it in prayer** occurs in the Mishnah (Ta'anit, ii. 4) in the litany for public fast-days, **"May He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah listen to our supplication." In the Gemara (R. H. 16a) the use of a ram's horn on New-year's Day is explained as a reminder of the ram which was offered in place of Isaac.** Hence the following passage was inserted in the musaf arranged by Rab in the third century (Zunz, "S. P." p. 81; B. Beer, "Leben Abraham's," p. 186) for that day (see Gen. R. lvi.; Lev. R. xxxvi.): **"Remember in our favor, O Lord our God, the oath which Thou hast sworn to our father Abraham on Mount Moriah; consider the binding of his son Isaac upon the altar when he suppressed his love in order to do Thy will with a whole heart! Thus may Thy love suppress Thy wrath against us, and through Thy great goodness may the heat of Thine anger be turned away from Thy people, Thy city, and Thy heritage!...Remember to-day in mercy in favor of his seed the binding of Isaac."** – Jewish Encyclopedia

There are several things worth noting from the quotes above.

First, as both Britannica and the Jewish Encyclopedia explain, in Hebrew the term "Akedah" means "binding" and refers to the account in Genesis 22 in which Abraham is commanded to offer his son Isaac to God as a sacrifice.

Second, Britannica goes on to note that according to 2 Chronicles 3, the Temple in Jerusalem was built in the same location as the sacrifice of Isaac. And consequently, "Building the Temple there invokes the binding of Isaac as the source of merit" and God is asked to show mercy to the Israelites out of remembrance for Abraham's faithfulness when asked to sacrifice his son. Of course, the Temple in Jerusalem was the location of countless animal sacrifices offered by the priests for the sins of the people.

Third, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, this understanding became a part of prayers in Jewish liturgy, including the Gemara, which is the portion of the Talmud typically dated between 200-500 AD. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, the binding of Isaac is invoked in prayer on Rosh Hoshana, the Jewish New Year. The prayer is similarly recorded in both Britannica and the

Jewish Encyclopedia. The essential concept expressed in the prayer is a petition to God to grant mercy to the Israelites and turn away from His anger because of the binding of Isaac on the altar of sacrifice.

Fourth, according to Britannica, when Abraham “was about to slay his son,” an angel “replaced Isaac with a ram.” Herein lies the essential equation. A human sacrifice is required. But an animal sacrifice is given as a substitute. This is the same basic concept articulated in the New Testament book of Hebrews. Animal sacrifices act as substitutes for the death of a male heir from Abraham.

Consequently, the fundamental concept expressed in this tradition is that it is Isaac’s sacrifice that makes animal sacrifices effective. Or in other words, without the sacrifice of Isaac, animal sacrifices would not be able to obtain God’s merciful forgiveness. This explanation for why animal sacrifices were counted as effective is present in both Chronicles and the Talmud, both before and after the time of Christ, both in the New Testament and outside the New Testament. And as we will see in our next section, although not the only factor, this is an important clue concerning how the New Testament authors could regard the Law of Moses as devoid of grace.